

Wonderland.

JOE SWEENEY – TAKE AWAY

We pair the artist up with pal and *Wonderland* contributor Max Cocking ahead of his exhibition at the Cob Gallery.



Photography Jim Turnbull Walter

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Joe Sweeney is the 25-year-old artist bending London over backwards, giving it a slap and making us examine it through a microscope. He is a unique, larger than life, tour de force Kilburn native, currently residing in Brixton. If you ask anyone about Joe they will probably have a great story to tell, he's always the first one to arrive at a party yet the last one to leave and will probably kick you off the decks at your own birthday (note: this happened to me).

Max Cocking catches up with artist Joe Sweeney on the eve of his first solo exhibition *Take Away*, starting this evening at the Cob Gallery. The show focuses on the everyday happenings, disruptions and dialogues that are seen as both familiar and strange in his ever-changing neighbourhood of Brixton. The theme of the market is explored; both on the street and perhaps the art market itself – questioning the notion of value within the once sacred white walled space.

Hi Joe! I remember when we first met you told me you were an artist, but isn't everyone nowadays... so I didn't really believe you. You now have your first solo exhibition at the Cob gallery starting tomorrow! So I guess this means you're legit! Are you excited?

Umm...Hell yeah. Let's be havin' yer!

What makes Joe Sweeney tick?

I'm always listening to music, love nothing more than putting on a banger and strutting down the street. I also love watching people examine objects, gotta love a boot fair tyre kicker.

I'm imagining you strutting down the street and I like it. You are quite a funny guy Joe and often your work is described as funny, what role do you think humour plays in a gallery context?

Humour is very relatable, I suppose I'm not tackling heavyweight topics with my work, but look more at everyday life. Particularly everyday life in Britain, there's a kind of comfortable depression we revel in which feeds our sense of humour, and it's a very good sense too!

The markets and produce you are putting on a pedestal here are most associated with the working class – how much importance does social class have on the contemporary London art world in your view?

I think we're definitely living in a time of heightened class awareness, but for my work particularly I think it transcends that and celebrates daily life in quite a nostalgic way, maybe my work in a way is a response to rapid regeneration. Art is one of the rare things that is for everyone, you make it for you and sometimes for other people, where galleries/ collectors want to take it after it's made is up to them.

I note the juxtaposed notions of the throw-away nature of the objects represented, and the permanence of works of art – is criticism of society's waste an element to this exhibition?

Not a criticism as such, more just a growing awareness of waste, especially my own. You should see my recycling after a heavy weekend. Waste is a good indication of human behaviour.

What are your thoughts on nostalgia and the impact on your work?

I relate nostalgia with colour. I think it's mainly down to the filters on tv programming when we were younger. I think colour in my work is the main thing it affects. That BBC test card girl's got a lot to answer for.

You've been known to man the decks from time to time. What's your go to tune in a DJ set?

It's gotta be Love Can't Turn Around by Farley Jack Master Funk and Darryl Pandy. It will rip any party a new one.

Who/what has inspired you and your work most throughout your life?

My mum's an artist too, she's got a great way of capturing a certain domesticity in her work. Definitely rubbed off on me. Plus my dad for his 'get on with it' attitude about work. They both have a wonderful sense of humour. You couldn't really want for any more, they're right behind me.

Check out Janet Milner.

You run online platform Don't Get Culty for emerging artists, designers and writers – what is your advice to young creative's starting out in the industry?

It's really hard not to cave under the pressure of 'what are you doing with your life?' when everyone else is working to such a set schedule. Make sure you keep up that interaction with other artist etc., trust your intuition; it's what lead you there in the first place.

IF IN DOUBT, STRUT. IT. OUT.

White Tac portraits, from a series of 12.

TAKE AWAY – 22nd March – 2nd April 2016, Cob gallery, London.