



Who is Mr. Lister?

The advertising world is forever seeking fresh talent who can challenge the typical, especially for brands looking to reach a more culturally savvy audience. Kieran Burke taps into one man who has captured the minds of the elusive globe trotting Generation Y with his ideas on the world at large.

MASS MEDIA is proliferating and it seems everywhere I look Paris Hilton rears her head. Here she was again. While scrolling down New York-based, Brisbane-raised artist Anthony Lister's website you are given a glimpse into the world of his work. A rogue's gallery of distorted cartoon characters and sabotaged pop culture icons sit atop each other while a video clip of Ms. Hilton, the unfortunate princess of pop culture, praises his work.

"We met in Los Angeles, she liked my work, I liked her legs, she did something for me, I did something for her, that's about it," he said simply, after I comment at the irony of her presence. "I look forward to you making me in to a superhero," she says on the clip and the result, by the way, is well worth an internet search.

Paris Hilton aside, Lister's work is the type that would give children nightmares. A proponent of the 'low brow' art movement, his paintings, sculptures and installations subvert the less glamorous aspects of popular culture, questioning our misguided role models and societies conditioning by mainstream media.

Where superheroes and Hollywood stars meant one thing to us at a young age, their relevance and messages are diluted the wiser we become to the realities and injustices of the world. Picture a slumbered Captain America with all the regalia of his outfit juxtaposed with a cigarette in the mouth, a can of coke and a coffee at his side and numerous butts of his addiction strewn about the ground. I think you can get where Lister is going

with this aesthetic and the message. "I'm a product of a misguided youth," he says in his calm tone. "I'm interested in raising more questions, making the obvious more obvious and easily talked about." And he quickly corrects me as I raise again the 'neo-blog tag 'low brow'. "I call my work party art," he said. "It's quite objective." Whatever you call it, it's an artform that is fundamental to pop surrealism and is full of gleeful humour or the complete opposite – sarcastic and dark comment combined in beautiful union with cute and perverse imagery.

From the outset of our conversation it was made obvious that Lister is far removed from the trappings of a cliché international art or design world. Saying he doesn't care much for what critics think of his work might be too strong but there is something refreshing in his comments, made with his innocent and soft voice. "Money is only good for two things. Eating and travelling," he said. "I guess I just don't put much emphasis on material possessions." And, on his rapid rise in the international art world?

Lister that many of us can understand. 'Australians are raised by Americans on TV' and 'TV is a contemporary mode of meditation to replace the fireplace,' and it's obvious that his insightful and cynical views influence his aesthetic.

"As a young Australian I was raised with the knowledge of Ned Kelly, Chopper Read, *Australia's Most Wanted* and *Funniest Home Videos*. I guess in some deranged way, these were the stories that interested me. I've always had more fun in places I shouldn't be."

But as a young skater in the suburbs with a penchant for graffiti it would have been delusion to think that one day he would be collaborating with Chopper Read on pieces of art. 'A contemporary Australian Ned Kelly... who knows? The majority of the minority of people that celebrate his legendary status also pay to hear him tell his stories and watch him act as himself. I guess I'm just like the rest of them, swept away in the pseudo romantic world of post penitentiary glamour, dazed by outlaw criminals reaping their just rewards long after the chaos of reality

numerous yearly world tours. He's only 29 but is a man in demand and his epoch is only beginning.

Global economic crises or not, his work is the sort that sells out before the masses are privy to a face to face with his aesthetic. At a recent exhibition on the Gold Coast, at a relatively small start up gallery 19Karen, his name on the bill alone ensured a magnetised mass crowd of the like minded. It may be a long way from the heady highs of international destinations but as if giving back to his roots, his humble appearance was respected by all.

A host of international publications follow his work with admiration and he is a regular in the titles that are considered at the forefront of contemporary underground works: Juxtapoz, Monster Children, Fecal Face and Modart. He has also published two hard cover books of his works, one simply titled 'Anthony Lister' and the other, 'Tales of White Trash Prophecy'. And the aforementioned publications title follows a long list of exhibitions with just as colourful names: Smells

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"I don't think about it. I mean, I appreciate people liking my work but I don't think about doing my work for anybody but myself." When I ask him how his critics react to the theme of human conditioning by mainstream media in his pieces, he gives an answer that both illustrates his blasé attitude and his ability to make you ponder his words. "It will be clearer once the novelty is gone." And I think this is what really attracts me and many others to his work and the enigma of Lister – he challenges you to think more.

"Jesus may as well be Superman," he writes on his website. "God is better understood as The Force, and the Devil is more easily recognised within the actions of our politicians and global corporate entities. These are our contemporary codes of living practice. Our urban mythology is now translated through comic books and television sitcoms. The distinction between good and bad plague our existence in every way yet remain ambiguous in their representation," poignant words that induce jealousy from me at his amazing ability to formulate such truthful prose. "We love television, we worship it," he said. I recently read two quotes from

has eloped,' Lister comments about Chopper Read on his website.

Born and raised in the northern suburbs of Brisbane, he now calls New York home. "It was nice to hear the birds in the morning," he says of his first home. "Brisbane was unreal to grow up in. I guess it was interesting, but slowly the world filtered in and I was attracted to it. You evolve you know? It was Barry Humphries that said 'Australia is the Brisbane of the world'." Again, I am left quickly processing his well-delivered line, thinking, questioning and agreeing. And his comments aren't stagnant and PR generated, this is fresh from the gob. While Brisbane has historically had a hard time searching for cultural credibility amongst Australia's major cities, its pseudonym of Bris Vegas is rapidly being wiped and it could be argued that Lister is the 'backward country towns' most prolific artistic export in recent history, yet he still manages to fly below the hype.

Los Angeles, Texas, Milan, Berlin, London, San Francisco and an ever-expanding geographical catalogue of exhibiting cities are accumulating a healthy portfolio of air points for him, his wife and his two children on their

Like White Out, Quit your sobbing and call me in the afternoon, Sunday morning prime time, God has a plan to kill me and Mythology for Beginners.

I put it to him that perhaps in the spirit of being 'attracted to and having fun in places he shouldn't be,' could he have ended up in New York with this knowledge. "Wew, that's deep," he said stumped. "I don't know about that." But there can be no denying the cultural melting pot and collaboration ground zero that is New York. "I guess it's working out. I haven't stood still long enough to have a clear perspective yet."

And for all the creative directors reading this and hoping to get their hands on someone who could make instant noodles look interesting, he says the advertising world is damn cool. "It's a world that really interests me and I think I would fit into it nicely," he says.

In all his quotable interviews and comments, there was one statement that stood out as gospel in the world of Lister: "I have said it before and I will say it again, I'm not trying to change the world, I'm just reacting to the world changing me". ©

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01 - 04 Anthony Lister's latest work soon to be exhibited in San Francisco, USA.