



Jayson Musson Interview Magazine March 2012

ART

JAYSON MUSSON IS MORE THAN HENNESSY YOUNGMAN

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Jayson Musson made his name as Hennessy Youngman, YouTube's straight-talking art pundit of the popular "Art Thoughtz," about the power and prejudices that govern the art world. Now he goes into the belly of the beast, with his New York gallery debut at the Postmasters gallery in Chelsea [opens March 31].

In the show we'll see Musson as on YouTube, decked out in gold chains, musing on Joseph Beuys and Jay-Z, why poststructuralism compensates for mediocre art ("If you can't make it, fake it—by over-explaining"), and how relational aesthetics are a ruse for awkward artists to make friends.

Accompanying the videos are selections from Musson's "Black Like Me" poster series, large text-based works that give focus to his personal writings on his personal politics, relationships and intoxication.

Interview caught up with the Brooklyn-based artist to discuss his new show, his beginnings, and his thoughtz on the art world today.

ALEXANDER CAVALUZZO: Going back two years, what was the impetus to begin the "Art Thoughtz" series and create this character of Hennessy Youngman? What void are you filling with his voice?

JAYSSON MUSSON: It started as a character in my first semester of grad school [at the University of Pennsylvania]. I began to acquire knowledge of a history, a certain language of discussing art, and I thought it would be funny for a Def Comedy Jam [1992 HBO series] comedian to discuss these topics. I didn't have a name or a platform, and I didn't do performance, either, I was mostly a writer and a drawer.

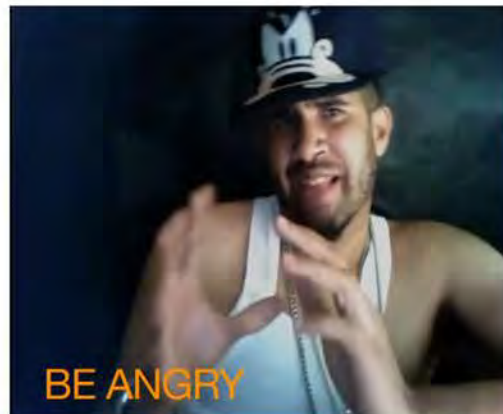
In the second semester I began filming the videos, kind of in secret. The first one was shot live at the Laughway House [Hennessy Youngman! Live at the Laughway House, May 2010], and I was working on the stand-up format. I didn't really like it because it was more about stand-up than about the writing? I re-did that material on a webcam and it worked. It was more about the writing and not recreating this fake comedy-club, brick-wall environment. I realized after the first video that this character was going to be a talking head, this rap art pundit, and I guess it was also a way of coping being in school, dealing with a history of ideas that I didn't feel a part of. While having fun. All my work uses humor.

CAVALUZZO: Do you think pursuing your MFA was a necessary part in developing your aesthetic?



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MUSSON: I think because the video project came out of a response to the academic end of funneling art production, in that way it has, but I don't really think an MFA is necessary. In any college setting, there's a concentration of knowledge and there's a certain training structure that puts you in a space where you're more able to make changes, but I don't think you need to pay \$60,000-100,000 to do that. You're essentially paying for the privilege of having a studio to work in. And a lot of times I feel like my friends have been really central to the evolution of my work; peers are really valuable and I feel like that's an asset of school that most people neglect.



CAVALUZZO: Interview recently ran a story on the Guerrilla Girls. It's shocking that after almost 30 years, their criticisms of museum and galleries for not representing enough women artists and artists of color are still relevant. Why do you think that is?

MUSSON: The whole conversations of things nationally in relationship to women, the politics of birth control, it's astounding that some of these things are being dug up and used against women.

I always say, "Are there more white people making art?" Is that why they're more represented in institutions? There's a history of art that has nothing to do with identity. It's kind of about white male identity, but they're figuring out this interior space. Pop is about mass media, minimalism is about form. That has nothing to do with white maleness, but that has everything to do with white maleness. When you have women and people of different nationalities making work, you don't have the luxury of dealing with these ephemeral topics. You have to deal with your experience of the world and the margin you exist in.

CAVALUZZO: Can you describe your posters, and how they work off of the videos?

MUSSON: "Art Thoughtz" deals with art in relation to society and the "black like me" writings vary from politics, sex, drugs, never really art, actually. The curators realized there was a running theme where I talk about relationships and love. Even though I've written about love, I actually realized there was a coherent theme to all this enlightening on relationships. And again, it's humorous and kind of morbid as well.



I've shown writing before, I had another body of work called "Too Black for BET" that started as a sticker street campaign back in the early aughts, and I became really good at ranting so these pithy slogans became diatribes, and that's how I learned how to write. I like showing writing in galleries; people have a beginning and end. It's funny when showing text in a gallery; people read it because people actually engage with the writing. I've never really shown the videos in the gallery setting or in relationship to my writing, which is kind of the back door to the videos.



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CAVALUZZO: Seeing as how these posters are being shown in conjunction with the videos, do you think that people will confuse you for Hennessy Youngman?

MUSSON: Yeah, because it's a public persona, and people may not know there's an actual person making this stuff or that that person makes other work. I was at this opening and this girl introduced herself and said, "Oh, you're so soft-spoken." I was like, "What? Do you want me to call you a bitch?"

CAVALUZZO: You recently put up an open call for submissions for an exhibition Youngman is curating at Maurizio Cattelan's new gallery, Family Business, and it's kind of like a free-for-all—

MUSSON: Yeah, anyone can drop off work and then I have 48 hours to install everything, or at least make it look like it's installed. It's going to be crazy. I thought it would be fun, no one would drop their shit off, but now it seems everyone is going to drop their shit off. And I've never curated before, I've never installed this much work. How do you put the Taj Mahal in a shoebox, you know? I know it will be really stressful, but I think it will be more fun than anything. I'm not worried about the professionalism of the show, I just wanted to offer something. This was offered to me because of the videos, because of the public, so it seems fitting that I should open the door up to other people so they can say they've shown in Chelsea. It's just a small gesture, kind of like a thank you.