

An Interview with the Artists and Photographers Walter & Zoniel at their Studio in Hoxton, London

By Flora Alexandra Ogilvy, February 16th 2016

The Formationist artists Walter & Zoniel live, work, sleep, breathe and create together. We met at their East London studio amidst the Brutalist architecture of Hoxton after being introduced at a talk I gave with the conceptual artist Lina Iris Viktor. Whilst drinking green tea in their matching boiler suits they showed me their supply of chemicals and photographic equipment. Together they work within the mediums of installation, sculpture, photographic process, film and performance as their art focuses on visually enticing the viewer into thought and momentary escapism.

Multi-disciplinary in their practice, the central themes in their artwork come from a meditation upon our existence and reflecting upon the intricacies of the relationships we share with one other and with the natural world. Last year they created installations for Tate Britain, Art Basel, Miami and the Venice Biennale, which all received critical acclaim and defined the pair as two of the nation's most innovative photographers and artists.

Looking ahead to this year, Walter & Zoniel are set to make photographic history as they collaborate with the Victoria & Albert Museum and Photo London where they will be creating

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the world's largest Tintypes of iconic Britons. They'll also be covering a whole gallery in paint in their Spectra public interactive installation at the Liverpool Biennial and potentially sending some of their art into space. We'll be in conversation with Walter & Zoniel at the South Kensington Club next week.

Was there a pivotal moment when you decided to follow your passion?

We don't think so. In fact, upon reflection it seems like that sentiment was always present if not predestined.

What piece of your work would you like to be remembered for?

Something we haven't created yet.

If you could be born in another period of history, when would it be?

We would be born in the future when humankind has mastered kindness, compassion and an understanding for one another. A time when nature will be in its absolute element and technology will channel that creative wonder.

How would you define beauty in 140 characters or less?

The successful focus of your mind upon a vision, which creates joy.

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Do you have a favourite book, film or painting, which inspires you?

We are mostly inspired by nature, the cosmos, science or 'reality'. Maybe *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring*, which is a beautiful film by Ki Duk Kim. It's a metaphor for the cyclic nature of life, something that we reflect upon a lot in our work.

What is your greatest indulgence in life?

Having a bath. In those moment when you have your mind and body twisted over a creative process, invariably wearing a dozen layers and boiler suit in a freezing studio, there is nothing more apparently indulgent and desirable than a bath.

What fictional character from literature or film would you like to meet?

Dr Cal Lightman from the American crime drama series *Lie To Me*.

Do you believe that true creative expression can exist in the digital world?

It can exist anywhere. The Formationist movement that we are part of is about our progression through the digital age, taking that context and using process to create further.

What do you wish every child were taught?

Meditation. If we were taught as children the means to reflect upon our own minds helping us to understand our emotions

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then that would have the most profound effect upon humankind and the way we all exist on this planet.

Have you ever had a moment when you questioned your career entirely?

Not in entirety, but regularly enough for refreshment.

What is your favourite museum or art gallery and why?

The fact that most of the institutions in the UK are free is amazing. The V&A, Tate museums and British Museum feel like homes from home and their immense architecture is the perfect calm within the chaos of London. We also love the De La Warr Pavilion, East Sussex for being an exquisite art deco institution on the seafront. We value the Walker Gallery, Liverpool for its insane sculpture collection where you can stand so close and connect with extraordinary classical sculpture. For photography the Open Eye Gallery offer a refreshing take on art and photography. Plus they're letting us throw gallons of paint at their gallery for the Liverpool Biennial so what's not to love.

Who would you most like to collaborate with and why?

NASA, the Royal ballet or the London Symphony Orchestra to have an interactive live performance installation. Musical surrealism would be wonderful, wouldn't it?

What is your daily routine when working?

Meditate, Create, Eat: Repeat. Bathe, Sleep.

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What has been your most inspiring travel experience?

On a recent flight to San Francisco we re-discovered the wonderment of flying, which is mind-blowing in itself.

What advice would you give to a young person following in your footsteps?

Stay focused upon your art, because like any great relationship it needs passion, consideration, attention and sense of romance. If being an artist doesn't present those feelings then find something you do feel like that about and follow your heart into it. You must also be fearless and follow your ideas.

Why do you love what you do?

The potential to affect people positively is completely addictive. We can't not make art, because we're obsessed with it. It saturates our days, nights and our every thought. Why do you love anything? Really, the magic of love's existence is as unfathomable as it is wonderful.