

For Performa Writing Live, artist Kenny Aquiles Ulloa produced a range of work in, around and from the work at Performa09, including a series of lurid collages called 'Black Girls' and a set of bootlegged DVD's from Terence Koh's performance Saaqiou. Here, Rachel Lois chats with Kenny about his work for Writing Live.

kenny: hey rachel!

rachellois: hey!!!!

kenny: free by any chance ?

me: I'm just writing you an email! – hilarious timing.

the email is titled he(u)lloa- which I like..

kenny: awesome!!

rachellois: ok- shall we give ourselves 30 mins yes?

kenny: perfect!

rachellois: ok. tell me how 'black girls' series is made- what is the process? The work comes out of an encounter right? An encounter with someone in proximity to a performance, who is not an audience member per se

kenny: ok, the long answer

Sent at 22:55 on Sunday

rachellois: you still there?

Kenny is typing...

kenny: typing:: one sec

Sent at 22:57 on Sunday

kenny: Performa09 performances took place all over new york city and the outer boroughs, and starting with the opening night, i noticed that a lot of the biennial has indirectly presented itself to new york locals, who have little or no interest in art

this was especially true in the Terence Koh performance at the brooklyn museum where performa had an event on one floor, while a completely unrelated DJ set was playing on a different floor.

The dj event had a different young, black crowd

rachellois: so you get chatting to someone who is in proximity to the performance, who is not there for the work but sees it nonetheless.

how did you initiate conversation with the girls in that crowd?

kenny: i act like i have no idea what is going on, and seek them to provide me with the information.

rachellois: and that person - a black girl in this case - gets pulled into the performance and subsequently into your own work.

what is it that these black girls bring to the work for you?

Sent at 23:06 on Sunday

rachellois: too big a question?

kenny: no no

me: i can hear you thinking!

kenny: haha

rachellois: or are you being ...careful?

because we can edit this and make ourselves read wonderfully concise afterwards

OR

kenny: no, just thinking! jeez

rachellois: we can leave all that this stuff IN

kenny: you should just copy and paste this chat ..

rachellois: hhmmtttt

kenny: see, now all of this is going to be in the middle of the interview and people are going to be confused. we can even talk about editing and faking a g-chat interview .. which will confuse them even more

rachellois: people will be fine

kenny: ok, let's agree to completely edit this entire g-chat.

rachellois: hmmm

kenny: no no , i mean, this is it ..

this is what they'll read

everything I'm writing now.

Sent at 23:12 on Sunday

Kenny is typing...

kenny: ok ok , back to questions

rachellois: So, what is it that these girls bring to your work, or to Koh's work for instance

Kenny: a lot of the work I witnessed at Performa09 directly referenced the relationship between audience and artist, so I just focused on that. The young girls i saw at the Brooklyn museum were blunt and having a good time... even if they didn't know what was going on. They're beautiful young girls who express themselves in such colorful and ostentatious ways... everything they say is off the cuff and direct. their opinions are rarely subtly conveyed and that juxtaposed with guys in suits watching a chinese man in a skin tight outfit painted in black .. that's funny to me.

rachellois: to quote one girl whom you cited in Black Girls /2, Mrzxxx Wifey, Koh was 'butt naked and murdered out' at his performance at Brooklyn museum that night. It's fruitful for me to imagine what that is, or how it could happen to Koh, but really i have no idea what it means!

kenny: well, within hardcore thug circles and the hip hop community, something that is 'murdered out' means ' all black

so a murdered out mercedes benz, is exactly that...

black car, black interior, black rims

black everything!

Kenny is typing....

Sent at 23:14 on Sunday

rachellois: How is these girls' rawness, garishness; the sex, fashion, slang, speed, and trends of urban culture, important for you in relation to Performa?

kenny: well, that question perfectly defines why they have everything to do with Performa09's ideas... Performa09 is all about futurism

and the way these girls live is so close to futurist ideals

it's shocking not many artists in the Performa09 programme refer to it

rachellois: refer to futurism 'now' you mean?

kenny: yes, futurism applied to now

rachellois: so for you Performa09's vision of futurism lacks this urban, young, raw element?

Sent at 23:20 on Sunday

me: ?

kenny: writing ::

Sent at 23:24 on Sunday

kenny: i'm just really bored and annoyed by afro-centric black art.

rachellois: you mean traditional rootsy stuff?

or the historical trajectory of that work?

kenny: I'm answering

hold on!

Sent at 23:26 on Sunday

kenny: art institutions tend to favor contemporary black artists who talk about 'black things' .

(one sec , still writing)

rachellois: ok

Sent at 23:30 on Sunday

kenny: and that is still so rampant, i mean, if i based all of my knowledge of african american culture on what art institutions showcase , i would think that black people do nothing but bitch about slavery and talk about africa.

so the 'black girls' is kind of taking a jab at the lorna simpson/carrie mae weem obsessed circles.

Sent at 23:31 on Sunday

rachellois: so you are trying to get away from black art being rooted in the past, or rooted in Africa

kenny: i get heated, sorry

one more note though

rachellois:i understand the need to want to look away from that

kenny: i'm dominican, which has its own set of identity issues, and i didn't grow up in the city ..

rachellois: other people do that work so you don't have to maybe? it's not about forgetting history so much as benefitting from the historical changes that have been made, and being able to look away from that to elsewhere. that is your privilege as an artist of course

kenny: in case anyone wants to call me out on the self-expression card.

rachellois: Not me. regarding that though. there is something curious about you positing your work from a black girl's perspective in the black girls series, there's a distancing there.

The work is entirely yours after all. But you don't distinguish between their voice and yours, in some pieces the authorship is not so clear. Perhaps this is a focus on language itself.

Sent at 23:36 on Sunday

Kenny is typing...

kenny: A lot of the language in my work comes from popular hip hop culture. i overhear that kind of speech everywhere in new york city ... and these girls, like

every youth in america, have their own super specific way of talking. It is so unique to their generation- 10 years ago 15 year old girls weren't posting neon colored rants on myspace. it's especially interesting to me that these younger generations have managed to make such lovely imagery with text

Sent at 23:42 on Sunday

rachellois: Tell me how the bootlegged DVD's of Koh's performance came about.

kenny: it came from the writing live group's discussions revolving 'scoring' performa09

i decided to make a video recording as a score of Koh's performance, because at the time i couldn't think of anything, and then later the recordings became the tkoh dvds.

counterfit DVDs are everywhere in NYC, random people sell them on the subways and streets ... i thought it would be interesting to see how an art audience, or Performa crowd, would react to the making and selling of a bootleg of a performance work versus a cheezy blockbuster. Getting some local vendors, some nice sengalese men, to help sell the DVDs heightened the situation.

rachellois: your making a score of Koh's work in that way goes back to the tradition of the score as something that is made from people who witness the performance and used - often illegally or without the permission of the artist/choreographer- to disseminate dance. I think that is the cause of the slightly antagonistic relationship live artists of all different kinds have with scores. It is still one of the main reasons why the score- as a document, as an approach or a devise- is not used or studied more widely in performance.

did you manage to sell any copies of tkoh DVDs?

kenny: everyone ran away from buying the DVDs. we are immune to people soliciting things in new york city.... Also, we were only on the street with them for about 15 minutes till we received very suspicious looks from police officers (bootlegs are illegal, and we had no way of proving we were not selling copyrighted material) pirated films and counterfeit merchandise is a huge problem in this city.

rachellois: well, what you were selling was not copyrighted material. Perhaps the finer aspects of intellectual copyright are at stake here. But that does not get away from the problems associated with copying another artist's work of course.

Kenny is typing.....

rachellois: the cover for tkoh DVD's was designed by an art student Abdoulaye Ndiaye and you advertise that you are giving all DVD sale proceeds to Ndiaye. You seem to be making a comparison or link between these two artists, in indirectly taking (open question) from one and giving to another.

kenny: you hit the nail on the head there ...both Koh and Ndiaye are in new york to make art.

and they share the same area every single day (Canal Street)

and they're immigrants

they have more in common actually... both are men competing for recognition, money and eyeballs

rachellois: highlighting the proximity between the two artists in that way is really evocative. it's using the performance to draw threads outside itself, connecting people or issues back into the work. it's perhaps similar to the black girls series in that way.

kenny: Yes, Performa09 does have real 'newyorkness'

it just needs to be uprooted ...

Sent at 00:16 on Monday

Rachellois: I'd like to know, what is risk in art for you or in your work specifically?

kenny: i never considered the risk factor actually before this conversation ..

i think when i make things, it always starts out as being funny to me ... and the mischievousness stems from trying to not take the work so seriously.

i like causing trouble ..

obviously it's not original to focus on 'making waves'

but i don't do something strictly for reaction

rachellois: it's interesting you had not considered risk, I'm open to the fact that your work may not actually seem risky to you

kenny: yeah, because in the end, it's just letters and numbers ..

i could just be making everything up.

Sent at 00:18 on Monday

Rachellois is typing.....

See Kenny's work at www.kennyaquiles.com/

See Rachel Lois's work at www.opendialogues.com