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Art Critique and Writing

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An Interview with Kota Shimizu: *Knowing the Artist and the Artwork*

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Originating from the East Asian country of Japan, seeing his sixth year here in America; Kota Shimizu is an expanded media artist, who is currently enrolled but following his last year here at Texas State and its Art program. With a love for all things fashion and an all-inclusive passion for broad political and social matters; Shimizu includes these aspects utilizing a wide range of media in order to create vibrant, engaging, and informal works of art. Using inspiration from his day to day, Japanese and American culture, and influences from broad concepts of social equity and reform; Shimizu creates a variety of work that is not only appealing to the eye but also work that leaves you wanting to know more about the subject matter.

After briefly sitting down face-to-face, or as face-to-face as you can get through a screen; we jump straight into the conversation by getting to know a little about not only Kota's overall personal background but also the basis, biases, and personal perspectives of his own artwork:



Kota Shimizu. *TX SKY*, 2020. Lithograph print and Acrylic painting; 4.5"×5.5"×0.5" inches.

**Do you think your art work is or has been influenced by your personal upbringing in anyway?**

**Shimizu:** Yes. I think that a lot of my past work has been influenced by where I come from and how I was raised. But after moving to America, a lot of that has progressed even more with learning about other cultures and social concepts. So now, instead of just doing work that I only connect with, I also include other issues regarding other people and their lives too.

**What are you looking for when you make artwork? Is it a sense of self, to influence others, to gain notoriety or is it even anything at all?**

**Shimizu:** It's changed a lot. I focus on more on visuals now since I want people to like my art. When I took Contemporary Art, after learning about these things, I started to focus more on the idea of society and social programs. I focused a lot on how artists express themselves in their work and now I focus on how I can express myself in my own artwork.

**Do you think that you find yourself losing or gaining apart of how you make artwork/your own personal style when creating work, outside of the academic realm vs when creating for yourself?**

**Shimizu:** I don't think so since I like to focus on visuals, regardless. I can draw well and that's what I like to do inside or out of school. In the same way, I think anything can be art but some art is kind of confusing on what is really considered "art". Basically, I don't think there is a difference in how I make art in school vs. when creating for myself just because I can always make something that is considered art, in a way.

**Do you think you style of work will ever change in the future; if so in what way do you think it will alter?**

**Shimizu:** I don't know. I don't really know what it'll change to. I feel like right now I'm trying to find my style of drawing but I kind of have a style but I'm still learning. Now, I'm still young, kind of young and kind of new to U.S. culture still; I've been living in America for six years though but still, you know compared to you guys it's still maybe less than half the amount of time for you. Before, I only knew Japanese culture; using and combining Japanese culture and

American culture, with Pop culture. There are a lot of experiences in American culture like drugs, or the music scene, or fashion, so maybe later since I'm going to be older my taste will change but as of right now, I don't know what kind of style.

**Do you think your art serves as a tool in any way for yourself or for others?**

**Shimizu:** I think so, yeah. Like as I said, after I learned History of Contemporary art, I strongly agree that art can influence society. But I'm not sure, I think it depends very much on which kind of art I make but right now for my thesis project, the theme is about the Atomic Bomb. The purpose of me making it is, I want people to learn about the Atomic Bomb more. Maybe with how it influenced people's health and bodies, and how horrible that was. I just noticed a lot people – in Japan too but in America, really only know the facts but they don't know the material and how horrible it is, but I want to get them interested and maybe it will help something in the future, like why they shouldn't have used the atomic bomb or participated in war.

**Have you ever used your least favorite medium when creating in order to challenge yourself if so, how did that turn out?**

**Shimizu:** I would say digital work, even though I'm an Expanded Media major, I would say I'm supposed to be good at that but I don't know. I think I'm really good at using my hands, like sculpture or painting or ceramics but I think I need more knowledge about digital media. There are a lot of systems that I don't know that even exist so, I don't feel like I have a choice to use them. It could be a really great system but I couldn't use them. If I know they exist I can search on my own and use it but I don't know them so I can't use them. So, I feel like I'm a beginner in digital media so, I think that's my least favorite. I want to learn though, that's why I'm taking

Expanded Media. Sometimes, it depends. At times, I feel very good but other times I feel like my art is University level and other times Elementary student level but I don't think I'm bad at it. I just think, I'm at a low level still, so I need to put in a lot of effort for that.

**Do you ever feel as if your art shapes you in a way rather than you trying to shape it?**

**Shimizu:** I never thought about that. It's kind of a hard question to think about let alone answer. Honestly no, I don't think so really. I don't really know entirely if it shapes me in any way but I mainly think I'm still kind of new to putting my feelings and my explanations into my art work, so maybe not – at least, for right now.

**What's the best piece of advice you've received?**

**Shimizu:** When I was into fashion back in Middle School, compared to other people I wanted to be “cooler”, and told my mom how I wanted to fix different things about me to fit that “cool” aspect. So, when I was a kid I just always cared about the outer or outside appearance and like outside appearances and how people see me, so I wanted to know what could be fashionable as a kid but after I came to America I met a lot of people who cared more about personality. So, when I said I wanted to be cooler as a kid, my mom told me that judging people is not just outer or outside, but the inside is more important. Like, whenever you have a great personality it'll come off on the outside, so my mom told me that and I realized how important that was. It made me realize how as a kid compared to now and being in America, that was true.

**Where is your favorite place to create work?**

**Shimizu:** I think in the studio maybe. I mean, I like to work at home but when I work at home but I think if I work at home, I'll be lazy. When I go to the studio, I need to work on a project while in the studio so its kind of really forces me to work on the project. If I get too comfortable – I don't want to say lazy but it's true. I get lazy if I get too comfortable in a place like my home or my room so, I like to work somewhere where I can really focus on what I make, and that's a studio.

**What direction do you see yourself going in with your artwork in the future?**

**Shimizu:** Right now, with my artwork, I'm focusing more on realism a little but I'm also into post-expressionism and Abstraction. I feel like I could end up combining the two. But I'm not sure, I feel like I will definitely do something related to art or fashion in general so, I would say something like that but I think I will try to be famous but I really think I will always try to be an artist, regardless.