



WORD OF MOUTH

## ARTIST AUREL SCHMIDT DOES NOT HAVE CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

BY JOHNNY MISHEFF



Artist **Aurel Schmidt**'s work is big and getting bigger. Her latest show, ***Man Eater***, is full of large-scale pieces, including a giant, two-paneled nod to **Morris Louis**' color field paintings. Her obsession with detail and color yield gorgeous results. Schmidt is from a Canadian town called Kamloops, which is a native term for the meeting of two rivers. With just 10 days left to see "Man Eater," which, until November 1st can be seen at

**Deitch's** Grand Street location, I finally tracked the artist down for a meeting of two rivers, so to speak. A no-holds-barred conversation about trash, sex and big important life experiences ensued... Here are some of the highlights of our talk:

***So I have a kind of funny intro question here. How bad is your Carpal Tunnel Syndrome? I mean, you must have it, right?*** I don't have Carpal Tunnel! I have this really high-tech desk that I designed and had made for myself. Plus a really good chair. I used to sit at the kitchen table and sit on a shitty chair, and I would be in sooo much pain all the time. Back pain, the works. But now I have it all figured out. Good angles. I'm comfortable. I mean, I was working 20 hours a day, for 20 days straight leading up to this show, and I didn't get any back pain.

***So your desk and your chair are on point. You are in the most natural drawing position it is possible to be in.*** Well, it works for me. It's trial and error. If the desk is like one inch off, I'm like, "MY HAND HURTS. OHHH one inch down is excellent!"

***Well, that sucks cause I thought for sure you had it. I'm glad you don't have it, but like, I was gonna GO with that.*** You thought I was suffering with Carpal Tunnel, and we would talk about THAT?

***Yes. Exactly. I did research. I found that the causes are interesting, and I wanted to know if you DID have Carpal Tunnel. The symptoms most resemble your experience. For instance, you can get Carpal tunnel from repetitive hand movements where the wrist is specifically involved... And smoking.*** Oh fuck. Well, I'm cutting down on the smoking, I only smoke like one cigarette a day.

***Oh good! Speaking of smoking, there are tons of cigarette butts and gross stuff all over your work. What's the big idea here?*** I think it's a reflection of New York in a lot of ways. I used to live in Canada, in a natural setting. So for me now to draw a beautiful flower, it's weird, I don't see them. I see deli flowers. I see tons of garbage. That's the street. You see it everywhere. The garbage is very vanitas.. lots of beauty fading.

***You draw a lot of trash, but I've seen sculptures where you used actual trash. How was that?*** It was really psycho. It was me and some interns down in some train tracks in Greece with latex gloves on, down there, all dirty, picking up needles and fishing line and cigarette butts. It was gnarly. Kathy [Grayson -- head curator at Deitch] recently asked me if I wanted to recreate that in Miami, and I was like, oh shit, I don't think I can fucking do that again or make someone else do it again for that matter. It's fun, but it's just really gross.

***Is this new stuff the biggest work you've ever done?*** By far. It's sooo time consuming. You reach a point where you're torturing yourself. I don't mind a certain level of torture, but not so much that I don't like doing the work anymore.

**So I want to know about the sex references. You're talking about it a lot more now, no?** Yeah. I think before I was more into in death. I was single, lonely, not fucking anyone, and not doing anything. Kind of obsessed with death. With the new stuff, there are weird references to child molestation or abuse, there's sexual disfunction in there. But it's all funny. Nothing's too serious. We're not making love in the dark. We're like, fucking and laughing. I'm into making things that are taboo not taboo. Laughing at yourself and the world. You know, I'm slapping two vaginas on a face where the eyes should be. It's funny. Or a smoking vagina. Who cares? It's funny. The body is funny.

**I love it!!! Are you currently having really good sex?** I don't think the references come from Good Sex. It's more from sexual mishaps. It's not like, "oh we always have perfect sex it's always great." I love the silly, unglamorous sex more. If I was only having great sex all the time, it'd be more like exercising.

**OK. Let's talk about the economy. Can you get into what the failing economy means to you as an artist?** It's something new. I didn't believe it for a long time. Like, it didn't affect me, it didn't affect me, it didn't affect me. And then it just became real. Like, the director of the gallery was like, yeah, this is real. People are investing in this fake thing. Illusions are high. It's scary because that illusion needs money. People are scared to buy anything right now. Art's pretty gross. People invest in art like an investment. I mean, you're not spending a million dollars on a painting cause you like it. But yeah, mostly everyone's so scared. Everyone's holding onto their money.

**So this DOES affect you.** Yeah, I'm getting ready for Miami, which is usually a disgusting money-fest, where like, everything you ever wanted to get rid of is GONE. You can sell anything. But now they're saying, "Well the 15 buyers we normally have for you, is really like five this year." It's weird. Not making as much money doesn't freak me out at all, though. Making money doesn't make good art.

**What's the most important event that has ever happened to you?** I was 14 or 15. I realized that no one had any control over me, and I was in control over my own life. I figured out free will. Existential freedom. This is MY life. You're my parents, but I don't give a fuck. You're gonna ground me? I'm gonna hitchhike into town and run away from home. What are you gonna do about it. I mean, what are you really gonna do about it? Hmm? As long as you know how to take care of yourself, which is pretty easy, you can do whatever you want. You can move wherever the fuck you want. Fuck it. You make your own happiness. That was a big one.

**Last question: What's next for you?** I don't know. After doing all the crazy, big, really figurative and emotional work, I kind of want to do still-lives. Try to inject the same amount of emotion and feeling and care but into something really simple. Just arranged objects. We'll see how that feels. But on the totally other end of the spectrum, exploring some of the other stuff I've been doing with weird fluids and weird paint would be fun too.

***Well I'm so excited to see where you go with it. You're awesome. Thanks for talking!***

Make sure to check out Aurel's show over on 76 Grand Street! You can also see a ton of her work on Tim Barber's website [Tinyvices.com](http://Tinyvices.com).

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