

MONSIEUR A



Our man Enzo Scavone had the pleasure to meet up with Monsieur A aka André aka André Saraiva.
February 8th, 2013, 3pm.
André's studio, Chinatown, New York.

Amateur Magazine: Hello André, thanks for taking the time to speak with us. Would you like to tell our readers about your current projects?

André: I have a lot going on right now. I'm shooting a new short film in L.A. and I'm organizing a show with Wes Lang. We've been staying at the Chateau Marmont and decided to do an exhibition there. So that's in two weeks. I'm finishing a book for Rizzoli which will be out by September.

AM: What's the book about?

André: My life. It's a big thing. It contains all of the work I've done since I was 14 years old. So more than 25 years in total. The book was made by M/M Paris and it's going to look really nice. I'm always working on lots of things at once: paintings, sculpture projects, movies, and finishing my magazine.

AM: You mean L'Officiel Hommes?

André: Yeah. The next cover will have Kanye West and Kim Kardashian shot by Nick Knight. It's going to be the first time they have been shown together on a magazine cover.

AM: At the end of last year you attended Art Basel Miami where you had a collaboration with JR, shot a short film, and organized after-parties. Can you tell us about the experiences you had there?

André: Oh, lots of booze, lots of drugs, lots of girls.

AM: No!

André: It's true! It was kind of like a spring break for older men. I had lots of fun and I did lots of things including a short film entitled "Love Henrietta." I painted this huge piece "Henrietta" from top to bottom, and I did two other pieces where I asked people to send me the name of their lover via Twitter and tell me why they love them. I chose the names and the stories I liked the most and then painted their names. The Hole Gallery has a villa in Florida. So I did a little project with the Hole. I held Le Baron pop-up parties every night in different locations. My other club called "Chez André" did pop-up parties with karaoke for a few nights. It's fun because I don't run the clubs like a business. We offer artists and the art scene a place to be, interact, and meet each other. That's always been the reason why I am involved in parties and clubs – and also because I like to get fucked up.

AM: Tell me some of the stories people wrote about their loves.

André: There were so many beautiful stories. It's fun how people send me all their stories. Sometimes you get very emotional ones – sometimes beautiful and sometimes very sad. I wrote the name "Lola." That was one of the cutest: there were two kids who had known each other since school. They were in love and now they are in their late twenties and they're still together. They sent me a picture of them as kids and a recent one as young adults. It just sounded like pure love.

AM: What does your job as the creative director of L'Officiel Hommes involve?

André: You know, smoking cigarettes, saying "Do this, do that...". In France we're still allowed to smoke in the office. No, the way I do the magazine is very personal. I'm not a real magazine person. I do it with a free mind. And as a creative director I really try to give it my personal take on things. So everything is very personal. I do the headline font by hand. All of the people I show are people I have a connection with, or I like, or know. Although it is a fashion magazine, I don't use male models.

I do fashion stories with Nate Lowman and Aaron Young. They are artists I like, people I like, or musicians I like. We do stories on them and I have great writers, for example, Glenn O'Brien who writes pieces that are more about politics than fashion. It's very multicultural.

AM: And what do you think of magazines like Amateur?

André: There are so many graffiti magazines today. I grew up in a time when there were no graffiti magazines and no internet. Even hip-hop music wasn't on radio stations back then. You had to go to certain places such as London to get a record or some mix tapes and listen to what you wanted. To see graffiti you had friends who had taken a photo of some graffiti somewhere. That's the only way you could see it. So you had to use your imagination, or really go places. At least this is a good one. I'm happy magazines like this exist and grow with this culture. It's dedicated to people who are into that culture. We are lucky to have them support us.

AM: What are your future projects?

André: The ones I just spoke about. They are for the near future. As far as the long term is concerned, I never know. Crazy stuff. I don't know. I am working on a feature movie though.

AM: Feature movie? Who's going to be the star?

André: Graffiti.

AM: Artists these days are often presented as rock stars. How important is an artist's image compared to his work?

André: It's always hard to say. For example, I love Keith Haring because I love his life, I love his style, and I love what he was doing. I love Futura because he was cool and I love his art as well. Their way of life was as important as their work for me. Of course I differentiate between the work and the person. But I also think it's interesting to know who is behind the work. It's not essential but we live in a time where it became part of the art. Terry looks like Terry Richardson and that corresponds to his work – it is part of his work. It's not the most important part but the public persona is part of it. Andy Warhol

started that. Or maybe before him Picasso and Dalí. It's not all but it's part of it. You have to integrate. Even in graffiti it has always been about creating a mystery around your identity.

AM: What is the message you want to convey with your art? Do you have a philosophy that you express?

André: Philosophy is always a big thing. First of all, I think in graffiti it's up to the person who sees the graffiti to decide what he wants to see in it. I think it's a very free art for that. You can project whatever you want. I always have a kind of happy-love attitude to my things, but sometimes it can be a bit cynical also, you know. I have fun doing my stuff. So if people feel it, it's good and fun. There is always passion and love behind my work.

AM: What lessons did graffiti teach you?

André: Uh, that life is fucking hard.

AM: Yes, it's not only graffiti that teaches us that though.

André: But as a kid, come on... being chased by the police, nobody cared about what you were doing, and getting in fights with all the other guys, all the time. You had to have a big, big belief in what you were doing because the whole world was against you. But now it's like this: a guy goes and writes a little thing and it spreads all over the internet. In my time you had to fight

for years and years before your name got recognized and you'd get a little respect. So it has taught me to be a good fighter.

AM: Do you have an example of a scary situation you got out of?

André: Broken nose, broken head, broken fingers, broken teeth. Not only me, some other people, too, by the way...

AM: So you dish out, too.

André: Yeah!

AM: What memorable responses have you had to your work?

André: I don't know. I've had lots. The best response I had was when I wrote a girl's name and they just came and fell in love with me. That was the best response I ever had.

AM: Did that happen a lot?

André: Yeah... a few times.

AM: What would be the project of your dreams?

André: You know, maybe fall in love again. Those are the things that matter the most to me.

AM: When you were growing up, what did your parents think about your graffiti?

André: My mom was just pissed off having to go and pick me up from jail and having everybody deal with all my fucking trouble and problems but otherwise she kind of liked it.

AM: Did she see stuff you did and say, "I like that"?

André: No, she was always like "It's shit." But I always knew that she meant well and she liked it. She probably thought to herself "What the fuck are you doing André?"

AM: Did she have a plan for your life? Were you supposed to become a banker or something?

André: Oh, no! Jeez, no, jeez. No, I think she wanted me to be a cellist or something. I think she's happy but she just thinks I show my face too much in the press and she thinks that's ridiculous.

AM: There is this ideal of the starving artist. What do you think about someone who doesn't compromise and only lives for his art?

André: I think we all compromise. Compromise is a very vague word. What is compromise? But in a way I like the idea. However, in saying that you don't compromise, you compromise, too. You know, it's like the "altermondialists"...

AM: What do you mean by the "altermondialists?"

André (to friend): Comment dis "altermondialiste"?

AM: Otherworldly?

André: No, like free the world, no taxes, no banks...

AM: Oh, anarchists?

André: No, I love anarchists

André's friend: Alternative... hippies...

André: Not hippies. Those who are like, "I only eat organic food, fuck you..."

AM: Hipsters?

André: No... Anyways, all of these pure ideas can become diluted. I think you have to try to follow your ideals.

AM: Did you go to art school? Do you think an education in art is essential for gaining recognition as an artist?

André: Recognition? No, fuck it! Recognition is very abstract. On the other hand, learning doesn't hurt. It depends on who you are and if you want to be part of a school or an institution. I didn't feel so comfortable in it but I always read by myself and studied by myself. I was very curious. Of course education is something that is good but it doesn't necessarily translate into recognition. That doesn't work for

artists. If you have degrees, it doesn't make you a better artist.

AM: What do you think about your character Mr. A?
André: The fun thing with Mr. A is that I was the first guy coming from pure graffiti like tagging to go on and paint other stuff than just my name. That's what they call post-graffiti. I was the first one to do that. Nobody else was doing it at the time and then very quickly ZEVS and Space Invader started. In that sense graffiti brought good stuff and a lot of crap, too. Graffiti is not yet defined as good or not. I always thought graffiti is more about the time you live in and the energy you invest painting it. I always say it's like an action or a performance.

AM: If you compare the street art/urban art scene in America and in Europe, do you feel there is a difference?

André: There used to be a difference but now everything is so ... everybody can see everybody's work. There is a lot more exchange. There is still a big difference because of the particular culture, but most of the things look alike. I remember a time when you could go from one city to another and you'd recognize the style of each particular city. You had NY style, L.A. style, Paris style, London style, Berlin style, Amsterdam style. And now you have stores to buy the tools for graffiti. I didn't have stores. I had to go and steal. The fucking car paints were shitty and we had to do the caps and do the ink. It was an effort. By the way, I'm really happy I can go to a store today. It's a lot easier.

AM: What do you think about the controversial figure Mr. Brainwash?

André: I don't fucking... I like him as a person. Why is what he does not better than what the others do? I think the guy doesn't fucking care and just goes for it. At some point you just go, why not?

AM: Do you know Banksy's identity?

André: Yeah!

AM: Yeah? Who is he?

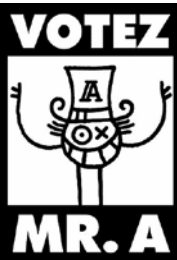
André: He is a cool guy...

AM: A cool guy! Okay.

André: He looks like an English football fan. He's good. He likes to drink and...

AM: Cool, that narrows it down...

André: ...and uh... you know, he has a really good sense of humor. I like to hang out with him.



AM: You run clubs in France, London, Tokyo, and New York. How did that transition from artist to club owner come about?

André: It's the same.

AM: The same?

André: The same – it was the same life. I was doing graffiti and I used to hang out in clubs because they were the only places open at night. At the time I used to sleep wherever I could. Most of the time I ended up sleeping in a nightclub until the cleaning lady kicked me out at 6 in the morning. It was part of my life. I made most of my friends in clubs and naturally I began doing my own parties. I was also very much involved in music. When I opened clubs it was more about just hanging out. There were no such places. Everything was ruled – at least in the 90s when I started – by money and bottles and TV fame. I wanted a place where I could listen to the music I like and have my friends around me. They don't have any money but they have a lot of things to tell and we wanted to be together.

AM: Your work means you have to travel all over the world. Where is your favorite place to live, where you kick back and just relax.

André: I really don't know. Every time I think it's a good place, I move on to somewhere else. I travel a lot between Paris and NY, but now I also go to L.A. a lot too. I like cities in general. I'm not a country boy.

AM: Last one. What is your definition of happiness?

André: I don't know. You tell me.

AM: I'm supposed to tell you what your definition is?

André: No, what's happiness?

AM: Happiness?

André: I don't know.

AM: I guess a state in which you like to be.

André: Yeah, but you have to be unhappy to wish to be happy. Love is the closest thing to happiness.

AM: Is there anything else you would like to say?

André: No, I think I'm okay.

AM: Alright, I guess that's it.

André: Thank you.

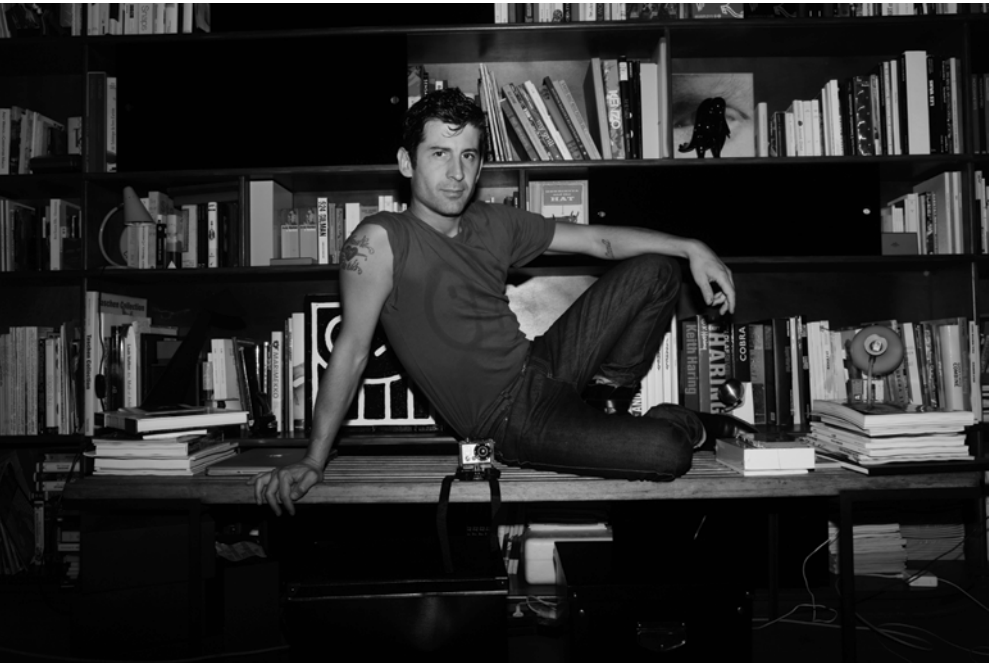
AM: Thank you.

Interview: Enzo Scavone
Photos: Olivier Zahm



illustration for colette

«...but she just thinks I show my face too much in the press and she thinks that's ridiculous.»



Wood, enamel, electronics, mixed media. 90 x 30 x 30 inches, 2012