

Omid Delafrouz

PORTRAITS OF A GENERATION

By Ana Ibarra

Omid Delafrouz's first memories are from when he was two years old and his parents fled with him from Iran to Sweden. Being so young, he blended in well but always noticed a difference: while the other kids and their parents took things lightly, for Delafrouz and his family everything was a matter of life and death and, as he explains, 'I have always carried a sense of the tremendous importance and mysterious nature of everything.' This sense of awe is translated into his work through intricate layers of composition and colour.

— *Is your Iranian background a source of inspiration?* It is something I carry with me even though I have never been back. Almost all I know of my heritage comes from what I have heard from my parents through stories and pictures. This sense of not really knowing where I come from became a fitting image of our species' condition in the world. Where did we come from? It is an utter mystery! In this regard, in being inaccessible, I would be inclined to say that it inspires me. This feeling of not knowing is central to all great art. As the painter Francis Bacon once supposedly said: 'The artist's job is always to deepen the mystery.'

— *Were you creative as a child?* When I was in kindergarten I was fascinated by the forms and colours in my surroundings, and strangely, perhaps, for this age, in how these forms were best translated or culturally stylized into images in magazines, comics and paintings. Without knowing why I sometimes got a headache when I saw a poorly drawn illustration in a magazine or on the cover of a cereal box. This was, of course, all instinctive. I wondered which was the best way to stylize a boat seen from up front, for instance, or a cat, or hair? I drew incessantly, trying to understand how forms worked. I drew certain characters such as Garfield or Super Mario so much that I could come to kindergarten and draw them by heart for the other kids.

— *Do you come from an artistic background?* My mother is an artist. Growing up, almost every summer we would go to Paris and visit great museums. For me, visiting such places was a mysterious event and has made me feel a life-long sense of awe and obligation towards

this tradition of image making. It is not so much the beauty or technical mastery of the works that has moved me, but that these people who once lived made these artefacts and now I can take part in what they saw during their lifetime. This funereal, uncanny communion has made me confident in disregarding Marcel Duchamp's critique of the overestimation of the masters of the past. I think it is not a question of mastery, but one of people who, through the means of their art, left us traces of an inner life. In this sense, art is the true epitaph of these people, not just some billboard for displaying technical skills.

— *How do you decide on your subjects?* Every new cultural period seems to demand a new form of expression in order to disclose to us its deep sense of mystery and meaning. More concretely, when choosing what to draw, I look for certain places and gestures that, in combination with the form I work with, take on greater significance. This significance may hold within itself the promise of one day disclosing some of the defining features of my generation's innermost workings.

— *Do you work with narratives?* Very simply put – and the emphasis is on the word 'simply' here – I could say that my work deals with the narratives of the dominant images that we have grown up with, and explores how these narratives echo throughout the lives of this generation. For specific reasons, it is all drawn and coloured with the same techniques that were originally used to make those very images.

— *Can you explain your method of working?* Right now I have a collection of a 110,000 of what I understand to be the dominant images my generation have been exposed to during the last few decades of popular culture in Europe. I have sorted this material into different categories, which are then the starting points that tell me I am dealing with one of the core ideas in culture and that a certain image must be produced. Then I find a fitting setting, that is a place or room, and invite friends to a photo session where I usually take approximately one to three thousand detail photos. These photos, together with the images that were their starting point, are the material I then use to make a pencil drawing on paper. When it's finished I trace the lines of the drawing with a black fine-liner on a light board on a new sheet of paper. This black-and-white traced ink drawing is scanned into the computer. I then colour the black-and-white drawing in Photoshop. Finally I print the completed work at the same size as the original pencil drawing and I frame the print and pencil drawings separately in two different frames, exhibiting them next to each other and selling them together as one piece.

— *What are your preferred themes?* I generally try not to make artistic choices so much out of preference as out of cultural necessity. Hölderlin wrote that 'a sacred language is missing.' The overarching theme in this early stage of my work is perhaps the difficulty of reverting with dignity to sincere, unhindered speech in the aftermath of lost coherence and a culture that lacks an overarching theme.

— *Is your work a reflection on your life and the everyday?* My generation has had this monstrous trauma to deal with: the history of the still image. I have become accustomed to calling this history 'the history of the surface', and I am confident that it must be dealt with in still images that consist of flat surfaces without any reference to the tactile history of the thickness of paint on canvas (which is a far-reaching sub-branch in the history of painting, but has nothing to do with the image). I know of no work of art from previous centuries that has really attempted this. Perhaps this is because they didn't have huge printers and weren't raised with things like the Garbage Pail Kids, or Mayor McCheese.



The Solar Eclipse, 2011, pencil drawing, digital print, 148 x 106 cm

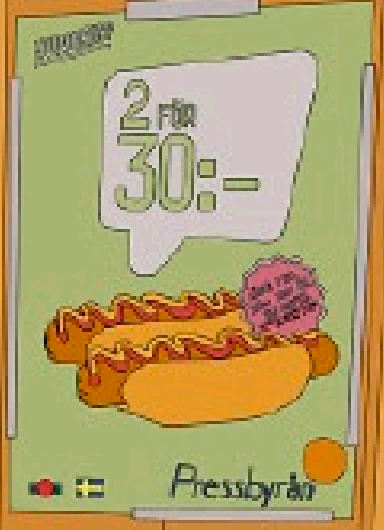
The Lonesome Skater, 2011, pencil drawing, digital print, 157 x 218 cm



Studio Visits



Don't forget



rushyd

Small yellow sticky note on the floor.

Crazy Funs



The Secret, 2011, exhibition view, 2011, pencil drawing, digital print, 157 x 218cm