

ANNAKIM VIOLETTE - Artist

In a culture obsessed with the minutiae of life, where we're encouraged to update our movements in real time on social networking sites, who wouldn't find it fascinating to see how other people live? Photographer Todd Selby has struck a chord with his website www.theselby.com, a glorious romp through the homes of a host of colourful personalities. Artist Annakim Violette has perhaps the most striking of them all: a baroque den stuffed full of her artwork, costumes and talismans. Unsurprisingly Selby wasn't the first to showcase her fantastic surrounds.

"A lot of the people that I've been photographed by have been other artists that I met through serendipitous synchronicities," says Violette. "There are very different energies to each photo session. I nicknamed the house Glamityville, a take on the horror movie The Amityville Horror, which is very dark and full of imagery like the walls bleeding blood. So I thought, 'What if my walls could bleed with glitter?' Right after I named the house is when I started being approached for photo shoots."

Violette grew up leading a self-confessed 'dandy lifestyle'. As the daughter of musician Tom Petty, she toured the world as a child, later spending stints in Paris and Iceland, and bouncing between the US east and west coasts before finally settling in Los Angeles.

"I feel like I have a lot of kindred spirits here, but it's not just about Los Angeles, so it's not so much about a location but a collective spirit... In my early twenties I felt pressure to explain myself, but now I realise that it has nothing to do with surroundings but what's coming from inside. But at the same time I feel like a lot of people have been drawn here," she explains.

"I didn't go to art school and I'm not a big fan of art school because my friends that did go had so many ideas forced on them; they were told who to be rather than finding out who they are. You don't need a diploma to be validated. That's why I don't go too much into my background because it doesn't fully explain me, and I don't mean that to sound pretentious. All the labels that can be put on someone are redundant, because they're going to change anyway. I like to keep as much mystery as I can possibly have, and it's not even a control thing."

Being self-taught – or self-actualised – Violette seems to have placed no boundaries between herself and her art. You only have to see how she lives, how she dresses and decorates her visage with paint and glitter, to recognise that she is committed to her artistic vision. “I’m not a very cerebral person, everything I do is very physical, very in the moment. I’m passionate and I guess I’ve always been that way, in my own world. I’ve always been interested in transformation and dualities. Things that are kind of taboo, things that don’t have a sense of time.”

While many of her contemporaries may reference pop culture or mine history for reinterpretation, Violette seeks inspiration solely from within. “I’m inspired by dreams. It’s your viewpoint. I think that people are taught in modern culture to think they’re crazy for having daydreams, but I feel like those are the message that we’re getting, and I’m not talking about a religious experience. The only time I’ve experienced a confrontation with my art is when I haven’t followed those visions.”

Working in different mediums to serve her dream logic, some of her most profound work has come from working with taxidermy, anointing them with colour and sparkle. The result is a spiritual reanimation of a long-dead creature. “The thing with the taxidermy was that I saw these trophies that people left behind – they were Victorian and extremely old,” she says. “It was confusing to me because here was such a beautiful creature that had been discarded. It mattered to me what had happened to it. When I work with the animals, I have a physical experience with them. It’s very different to my painting, my more dreamy work, where you’re drawn more into yourself. So many people have loved the taxidermy, so there hasn’t been much controversy – I didn’t want it to be exploitive or political.”

Being an artist is more than having a tangible representation of a concept, or in Violette’s case, a subconscious conversation with herself. Violette seeks to elicit a visceral response from the viewer, for the work to precipitate a psychic change. “I feel like the things that are confrontational in the world are the things that people are scared of. I feel like the track that I’ve been on has been supported because other people like that energy. Even though art technically could be considered a superficial thing, I’m using botanical themes, the taxidermy, though it’s already dead, will eventually decay. I think that gives people a sense of freedom.”

Moving freely between the worlds of artist and muse, Violette is currently working with photographer Autumn de Wilde on an as-yet-unnamed project. She will also be featured in an exhibition of Selby's portraits at the cultural salon-cum-department store Colette in Paris in April and she has group show coming up at 'Showcase' in the creative enclave of Echo Park in Los Angeles. But there's something else, something that may prove to be the culmination of her aesthetic and craft. "I've always wanted to make music but I've put it off because it's been my dark master," she admits. "I never saw a reason to take it out into the world but I love music and I love art, and I love incorporating the two, so that's what I'm working on right now."

There is a sense that Violette's art demands much from her, and being her own work of art, that she expects much from herself. That categorisation would be a kind of death, the desire to remain mutable a strong instinct for her. "As much as people see me as a strong person, I'm actually very soft. I don't follow or lead, I just want to be."

Interview Rebekah Davies