



Interview by  
Lance Scott Walker

## HARIF GUZMAN

A LONE WHITE WOODEN DOOR, WET WITH SLEET, IS ALL THAT SEPARATES HARIF GUZMAN'S STUDIO FROM THE BIG SWINGING GLASS DOORS OF THE BOUTIQUES AND SHOPS THAT LINE THE SOHO STREET HE CALLS HOME. WE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO COORDINATE THIS INTERVIEW FOR THE BETTER PART OF A WEEK THROUGH RAINSTORMS, SNOWSTORMS AND NOW SLEET AND SLUSH COVERING MANHATTAN, AND A PHONE CALL SUMMONS THE TALL VENEZUELAN-BORN ARTIST DOWNSTAIRS TO LET ME IN. GUZMAN LIVED IN NEW YORK GROWING UP BEFORE SPLITTING HIS TIME BETWEEN CALIFORNIA, MIAMI AND LONDON, BUT THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN HIS BASE.

mean? And you're just not scared. I don't give a fuck. When you start to learn how – I mean, there's certain people that are very inspirational to me, like Damien Hirst, meeting him and to see the kind of level that he's doing shit on and then to see other businesspeople operate, it's just like the art world's taken such a dramatic change in the past six years, I think, just due to the fact that the social media aspect of it. And I feel like there's a lot of artists out there, but they're not painters. They're just fabricators. And they've got great ideas to produce cool shit, but then there's painters and then there's artists. There's two different things, and I feel like everything's more... you have to be more business, business-wise... you don't want to have to deal with business in art, but the art world's changing.

**Well, I think the thing is that traditionally, if you don't come up through those channels, it's a lot harder for you, but do you think that's changing? Over the past few years?**

I think it's definitely changing. You gotta go back to the aspects... I know you have people... you have an influx of contemporary artists and all these contemporary artists now that have their stuff on the Internet, so I feel like the collectors, or if you have someone that helps build collections of art or someone that you work with, they can look through 40, 50 websites a week and then they have to visit the studios, and it takes kind of the intimacy of actually going to see the work in itself... and in a way I think it's all changing, because I think the contemporary market's just grown so much, kind of taking a lot from the masters and the classics, because who can actually collect those things? I feel like they're dying out. People who were in masters and classics now have switched over and they have to pay

**Harif Guzman's work is on display**

now until April 20 at Deborah Colton  
Gallery, 2445 North Boulevard.

[www.harifguzman.com](http://www.harifguzman.com)



attention to the contemporary market. And business-wise, now you have a kid who's *not* a painter, who's just doing graphics in Photoshop® or just doing posters and has a website up and he's tweeting, he's stroking all the galleries, emailing 10 times a day – he's gonna be in those shows. As to where like old school painter's in the studio, painting, and there's no limelight on him, because all these people have just filled in the gap that he normally would have taken. All of that stuff is changing with technology. But the one beautiful thing about being a painter is that I didn't get into painting to follow any rules. I didn't become a painter to follow anyone's rules. And I think it's a trade that I think some people and families still hold in high regard, like a doctor or a scientist, and I think it's an important trade because it's something that's so old school that it *has* to remain alive. It *should* remain alive forever. Just painting. Not just fabrication or things like that, but actually be a painter. There's some people out there that still respect it, and will always respect it, I hope. Painting's something I do. Not the success or the money. I mean, it's something I've been doing for a long time, just not *living* the success of what I do because by default almost, being mentally ill or something, it's like the only treatment I have for my problem, I guess, but... when it's good, it's good. But when it's bad, it's even better, because that's what fuels your work. All the bullshit that you have to deal with, and all the struggles that you have help fuel you as an artist.

**A**nd he's at home here. Inside, the massive studio loft he occupies is alive with the work that covers nearly every wall, from hints of his time spent as a street artist to his paintings, photography, design work and the Texas-centric, light-fitted oil rig installations that will appear in his Houston show. He's a couple of days away from shipping those at this point, and he's been up all night painting, maybe all week. Regardless of the success he's seen as an artist, Guzman has been working on a series of concepts and techniques for the past two decades that he feels are only recently taking the form he envisioned: "I'm only just now beginning to get to paint." We sit down in his living room in the balcony overlooking the studio and he lights a cigarette while we listen to The Cure and his five-year-old bulldog, Flip, falls asleep next to me. Imagine him snoring throughout the interview for maximum effect.

**You've had a different hustle because you didn't come up through the traditional channels, right? You didn't go to art school.**

No, barely went to school; skateboarding, just doing warehouse work. You name it.

**You look at everything differently when you don't go up through that system.**

Well, it's like I've had everything and I've lost it so many times. So many fucking times, you know what I

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**DEBORAH M. COLTON, DEBORAH COLTON GALLERY**  
 Venezuelan-born New York artist, Harif Guzman debuts in Texas  
 this month at Deborah Colton Gallery, which is an international  
 contemporary arts gallery based in Houston. Art works above from  
 current exhibition, *Dying to Live*. Please call for a consultation. **2445**  
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Ry Rocklen  
*"Daisy Chain"*, 2013  
 \$6,500

Ry Rocklen enacts subtle manipulations on found objects, transforming them into resonant, Duchamp-inspired ready-mades. For Daisy Chain, Rocklen found an embroidered crewel depicting a bouquet of daisies and encased it with a copper and nickel shell, foregrounding the patterns in the stitching.

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Nathan Hylden  
*Untitled*, 2013

Nathan Hylden uses rigorous conceptual processes to investigate the relationships between cause and effect, absence and presence, and emptiness and meaning. He maintains that the processes and materials of painting are, in themselves, filled with meaning, and uses various techniques to add texture to his often-monochrome paintings.

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exercise from the performance piece, *Public Games for a Private Group*.

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Harif Guzman  
*Sandy Witch Collection - Now That I'm Sober...*  
 \$40,000

Venezuelan born, New York based artist Harif Guzman strives to capture the feelings of loneliness that exist within personal change and tragedy. In Sandy Witch from the Collection - Now that I'm Sober? Guzman responded to the devastation of Hurricane Sandy after wandering the streets of New York City post-storm.

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# THE GREAT GOD PAN IS DEAD

Wednesday, March 20, 2013  
**Harif Guzman: A Closer Look**

[Virginia Billeaud Anderson](#)

Within [Harif Guzman's](#) portfolio are artworks that reflect that which is exhilarating and soul-destroying about New York. Examples can be found in his collage series "Uptown Downtown" in which photographic images of fancy people surrounded by fornicating cartoon figures posit the Warholian assessment that New York swells will rush downtown to embrace the underbelly. Guzman's [Dying to Live exhibition at Deborah Colton](#) gallery through April 21 contains a few others, such as New York Lowlife which encapsulates New York's high-brow and gritty with a coke-snorting cartoon figure that looks like Shakespeare and has blinking LED lights in its brain and "The New Yorker" inscribed above.

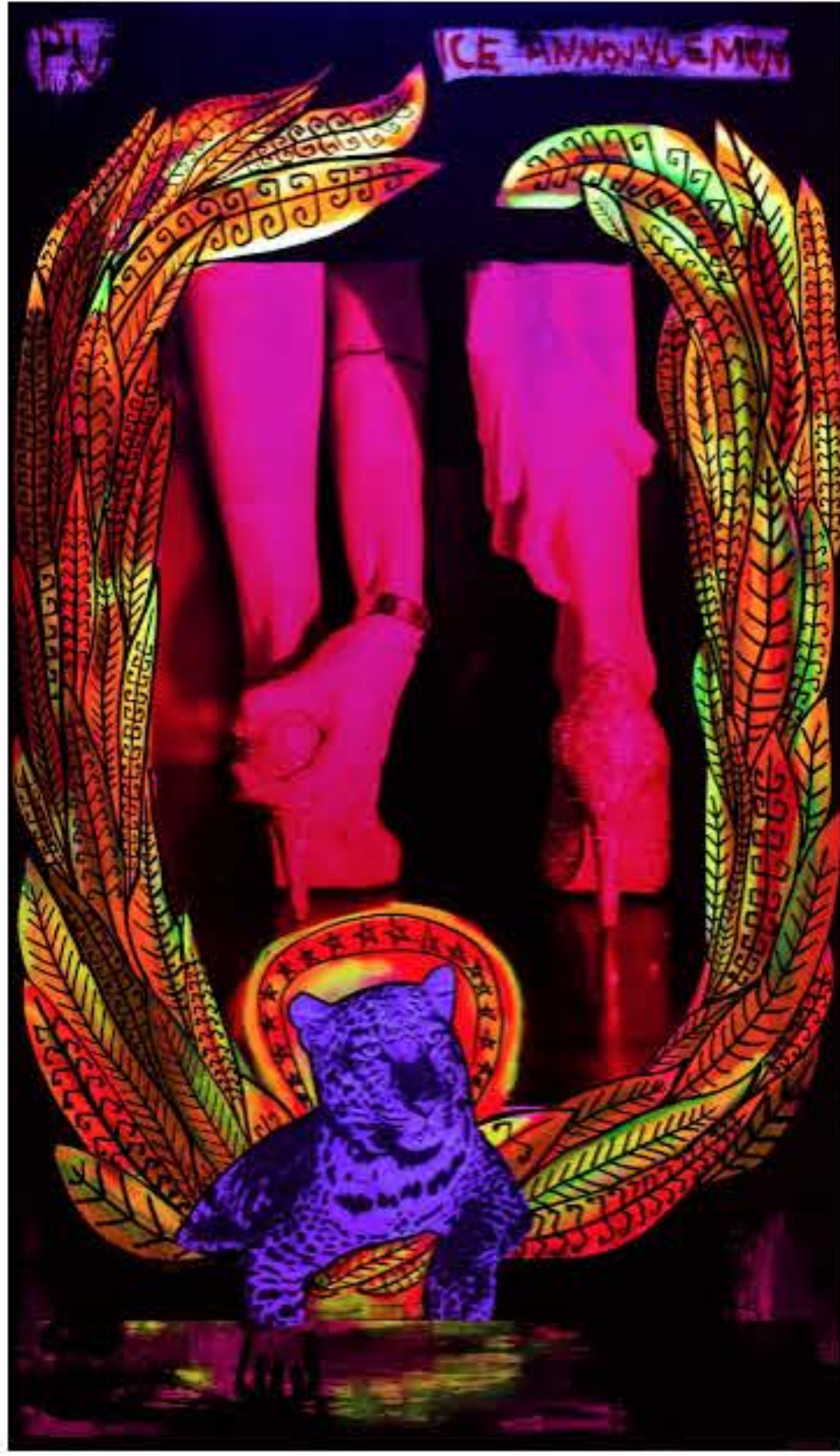
From statements made in interviews, it's clear Guzman operates under a particular conviction related to art-making and life, gained from the experience of having overcome homelessness, that one must have real balls to exist in New York, and that to succeed as a collage or LED-light or photography, or video artist requires unholy scratching and scraping, which struggle, the only meaningful worthwhile thing, will probably do one in. *Haculla Coco Chanel* שו'תאקען צוס'יף א צאסו'יעלע-ען צארטוטו'ריבז'טוטא'ג'צאזר'יפ'הן גרוינע ווע finger. The old woman's abundant wrinkles under her fashionable grand-dame hat emblemize the creative path interrupted by decay and death. Searching the artist's portfolio I found a conceptually similar piece with a booze-bloated, strung-out Joplin.



Harif Guzman, *Haculla Coco Chanel Collage*, 2011, Mixed media, 95.5 x 49.5 x 3 in

A handsome Venezuelan-born artist, especially one doing big deal things in the fashion and music industries, easily arranges to photograph beautiful women. One writer used the word pornography, but that is too strong a phrase to describe Guzman's eroticism, which is less mouth-dropping than what can be found on Greek vases and Indian relief carvings, and reminds me of Picasso's early drawings of figures screwing. Due to his success, there is an abundance of Guzman's images on the internet, which is the reason I am aware that some of the exhibition's collage elements originate from his fine art photography "Red Series," in which he captured nude beauties in red-toned atmospheric illumination. A memorable photo has a blond posed butt-up doggie style near an image of Robert Plant with "Led Zeppelin" inscribed, possibly meant to amuse geriatric viewers with "back door man" connotations.

I mention Guzman's fine art photography because a noticeable piece in the exhibition includes collage components from "Red Series." *Feline* glows like a stained glass window at Chartres, due in part to its blue-toned illumination. The painting's photographic centerpiece features female calves above theatrical high heels that echo unsee'ri ru'mi' in the 'air 'is par' of the story, 'anu' den'batu' is a large cat with a halo surrounded by colorful botanical motifs. In one piece Guzman manages to filter impressions of nature's organic forms, liturgical lighting, and a whore house.



Harif Guzman, *Feline*, 2012, Mixed media, 96 x 54.5 x 1.5 inches

After viewing the exhibition's thirty seven mixed-media works I decided to ask Guzman a few questions.

**Virginia Billeaud Anderson:** Please clarify the term "mixed media"-- tell me about your materials.

**Harif Guzman:** Oil stick enamel, wheat paste paper glued on wood panel, acrylic - house interior paint.

**VBA:** Are the photographic images collaged in and painted over?

**HG:** Yes

**VBA:** Do they sit on a structural ground such as canvas, or panel?

**HG:** Yes, on a canvas and sometimes this canvas is adhered to a wooden panel.

**VBA:** Are the artworks originals, or printed reproductions made in series?

**HG:** Reproductions of photos, but they are all original works of art.

**VBA:** Your recycling of fine art photography is intriguing. Did you digitally alter images from "Red Series," with photo shop or other software?





**HG:** No, they are all shot with natural light and/or red lighting, not altered with any software.


**VBA:** According to your artist statement, your work "is about transformation." Please elaborate.

**HG:** Deconstructing and then reconstructing, starting off with one the end result

**VBA:** Comment on the meaning of the exhibition's title "Dying to Live."

**HG:** It means sometimes you have to lose a lot in the creation process, all you got until almost dying, the more you feel struggle and approaching of a sense of death, the more you can feel alive. Emotional struggle during the creation of art.

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Posted by Robert Boyd at [6:26 AM](#) 

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