

# Oil paint is cold to the touch

Transcript of the live interview by Julia based on questions posed by ACS Magazine, Chicago, Illinois.

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*Julia:* Hi Antonio, how are you?

*Antonio:* Hi, I'm fine, thank you.

*Julia:* So you live in Leipzig now, right?

*Antonio:* Yes.

*Julia:* That's interesting. You are Italian and your career started somewhere in Italy?

*Antonio:* I was born in a coast town on the Gulf of Naples, Southern Italy. In Rome I studied psychology and philosophy at the University La Sapienza, and painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti. Especially philosophy was very revealing for me. I discovered some ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein which today I still deal with. For instance his focus on the relationship between language and life. Also logical mathematics and the structure of languages fascinated me, because their strange poetry.

In the academy I met two fellow artists with whom I founded an artistic group called "grupposangiorgio". This group had a great importance for my formation as it was a platform for ideas and discussions. Early group exhibitions focused on painting, later on installations and multi-sensory performances.

*Julia:* You are presenting for ACS Magazine some of your works, right?

*Antonio:* Yes, some paintings. Before I have worked with several medias, but today I focus only on painting.

*Julia:* What made you focus so much on painting?

*Antonio:* Painting has everything I need. It's a physical activity but at the same time very mental. It involves conscious and unconscious processes. It brings unforeseen images which can only emerge through its specific process.

*Julia:* So painting is more physical for you than other mediums?

*Antonio:* Certainly. The image comes out through a tactile, body to body, relationship. The visual dimension is subsequent and concerns mostly decisions and choices, rather than creation of events. Furthermore, the painting's image does not require any tools such as a camera or computer.

*Julia:* So what are the key elements which launched your artistic career?

*Antonio:* Some experiences changed my life. For instance, at very young age, I painted with oil a series of landscapes. This imprint left a decisive trace, and it still work on me.

In 2003, I saw in Paris a retrospective of Nicolas De Staël which touched me so deeply that I couldn't continue like before.

*Julia:* What was touching you so much about this painting?

*Antonio:* Its powerfull reality. He embedded something human into the flesh of painting. I experienced living creatures made of paint.

*Julia:* How your environment and other countries actually influence your artwork?

*Antonio:* That happens in different ways. I'm very sensitive to the character and energy of my surroundings, spaces and cities.

*Julia:* You moved to Leipzig a few years ago, and that also changed your way of making art?

*Antonio:* I have developed a more intimate painting process, also as a consequence of a slower pace with respect to my previous life in Berlin.

*Julia:* Is the city a source of inspiration?

*Antonio:* Not directly, but for sure its aura influences me.

*Julia:* Coming back to your process of creating. Did it change? How is it nowadays? Do you work in series, for example?

*Antonio:* My actual process of painting offers at the beginning few possibility to control the outcome. I provoke events in a body to body relationship with

painting. Only afterwards do I use my eye for making decisions. When I perceive that something alive is there, I care about this new coming presence. For that my images are completely not premeditated.

I could say that I use two types of control: one bodily and unconscious, another visual and conscious. The process of physical contact-detachment between "body/painting" and eventually "eye/painting" is complex and happen following a non-linear path.

Concerning the series, they happen not as a purpose, rather a consequence. I have a one to one relationship with painting. A series is the outcome of a journey through a certain human field.

*Julia:* In your artistic statement, you said "I am interested in revealing different degrees of artificiality, ranging from the myths of nature to the intelligent design of humans and biosphere".

Why does this research interest you?

*Antonio:* I explore the narratives which shape our understanding of reality. The journey of my cultural references ranges from the Romanticism of the early works to the actual Ecologic and Posthuman sight.

My approach to painting has a political purpose. I want to make visible the artificiality of Western humans, while adding within the flesh of painting a tangible dimension which I consider deeply human.

In the West, the contemporary disruption of the tangible world is the result of long-term efforts to get rid of the flesh because the perishability of the body and fear of dead. The very purpose is to transform humans into something enduring: a pure intangible idea. From Plato until today, this process of artificialization has developed steadily to the point that now we are left with almost only images of the world and ourselves.

Furthermore, I call my painting "artificial" for pointing out its real matter: the conventional language of painting, which in my opinion is the real messenger of narratives, strongly than iconography.

*Julia:* How your art helped you to make these discoveries?

*Antonio:* Painting gives rise to unexpected images. They constitute a tangible reality in themselves. They are present as a tree. These ontological "images-presences" are the significant statement. Instead, the mental concepts have an ancillary role.

I feel an analogy between the actual flesh of humans and the matter of oil paint. They are very similar, to the point that sometimes I'm surprised that the "flesh" of the oil paint is cold to the touch.

*Julia:* In which way did your recent show "Hope for the Ape" support that research?

*Antonio:* In shaping off the ape and pointing out our contradiction. Let me explain. If modern humans are shaved apes, it's worth taking into account both dimensions: the bodies and the narratives, the biology and the culture.

*Julia:* So in which way do you prefer to bring out your work to the world and to the public?

*Antonio:* I wish to provoke an encounter between one person and one painting. I imagine using small cabins hosting inside one painting, and giving space to one person. This way has political function.

*Julia:* In which sense?

*Antonio:* The personal is the political. It is through the enhancement of the individual-existential knowledge that transformations are possible.

To the masses one speaks through propaganda and manipulation. To individuals one speaks through an authentic personal message. This is the path which interests me.

*Julia:* So the one-to-one experience is very important for you.

*Antonio:* Yes, very important.

*Julia:* But what has been your experience of exhibiting at art fairs, for example.

*Antonio:* Purely commercial situations have the limit of focusing on just one aspect. Fairs may have this limit. I participated in the Supermarket Art Fair of Stockholm where sometimes I had the nice experience of seeing the authentic curiosity of some visitors.

*Julia:* Before you were referring to those multisensorial experiments in your home country. Did you feel that people have a deeper understanding?

*Antonio:* I like multifaceted cultural environments, like London and Berlin. Large cities with their cultural diversity usually imply a curious and open-minded audience.

*Julia:* You've been shortlisted for the Gottlieb grant. What kind of experience was that for you?

*Antonio:* It was interesting and productive to review my entire artistic career. This work gave me an overview of my journey and also pointed out some topics I had lost sight of.

*Julia:* How does the public react to your work?

*Antonio:* In very different ways, ranging from enthusiasm to detachment. I believe that painting and generally a visual experience is not universal. Instead, it's strongly conditioned by the specific cultural knowledge. If the visual input doesn't match the recipient's knowledge, it will communicate very few. Especially today, in times of virtual communication, noise often prevails.

*Julia:* Do you have any upcoming exhibitions?

*Antonio:* I have several projects not yet defined. At the present I can tell you that they will bring me toward the United States and Middle East.

*Julia:* Thank you very much for this interview and opening your ideas for me.

*Antonio:* You are very welcome and thank you so much for your time and curiosity.

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