

Jesse Morgan Barnett interviewed by Benjamin Lima  
November 2015

This interview was conducted via Google Docs on the occasion of the exhibition "Lorem Ipsum" at the Pollock Gallery, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, November 7 to December 12, 2015. "Lorem Ipsum" was curated by Danielle Avram, Pelican Bomb (Cameron Shaw and Amanda Brinkman) and Ben Lima. Jesse agreed to participate in the show at Ben's invitation.

BL

Where were you born? What was your family like? What was school like?

JMB

I was born in Taegu, South Korea. July 31, 1978.

My mother lives in Seoul with her sisters, brothers, aunts, and mother.

My sister lives in NY with her husband.

I grew up in Atchison, Kansas. Population 10K.

Very few schools.

I wanted to go to Atchison Catholic Elementary School because the public school took PE showers prematurely in my mind.

I love King Spa.

So maybe overdue after all.

BL

Was there a single moment when you decided that you were going to make art? Or was it more of a gradual process?

JMB

Gradual. I thought I could give away ideas as a child. I could locate all the boxes in my parent's video store (MOVIE MAGIC!)

I liked playing Lemonade. I liked super people pen drawings with titles and collecting and trading sports cards.

Images and videos.

BL

Could you talk about your formal (and/or informal) training in art? How did that shape your approach to your work?

JMB

I enrolled into art school in the photography department.

I recently graded some land for bird seeding.

Oscillation is preferred. You don't want wind blowing in your face constantly.

BL

As you know, this exhibition generally addresses questions of exhibition-making. For my part, in contacting you and the others, I invited you to address the question of how you make decisions. As a viewer of art, I always find this question has an intriguing mystery. How do you respond to this topic?

JMB

The decisions in this work are about editing out or down. Jurassic Park has too much violence for a 4 year old. Take some out. Jurassic Park is not a great movie. Change some of the editing. Size comparison charts entertain and inform.

I found the exogorth (star wars space slug) superimposed onto comet P-67 for scale.

BL

Here at the Pollock Gallery, you may find viewers who drop in--students or others--who have no familiarity at all with any kind of conceptual art. What would you say to such a viewer who might be baffled by art that is not made in a "traditional" format?

JMB

Clarity can be underwhelming. Try and avoid confirmations about what you already think you know. Redeployed perceptions are preferred.

BL

When we met, we discussed being a dad. Now, there is a lot of literature on being a dad. But maybe not so much on being a post-feminist dad, with a lot of child-care responsibilities and two careers to juggle. And also, maybe not so much literature on being an artist who is a dad. We hear about artists' parents but maybe not so much about artists as dads. Can you say something about being an artist dad?

JMB

Parenthood is an emotional mixture of winning and losing, spontaneity and endurance. I'm still doubting my qualifications. It's clear that artists have a significant degree of cultural permission. I didn't realize the correlation this had with being a parent. Toddlerism has helped my personal life. I'm curious about small things again.

August is indirectly agnostic and indirectly persuasive.

BL

Your idea for the display format -- bringing in the table, and arraying some work on the table -- I thought was perfect for this exhibition. The table as "landscape for decisions," in your words. What do you think about different display formats or this one in particular? For example: Does sitting at the table make viewing the piece more like working--the viewer is literally sitting in your chair? Is it like sitting in the desk of your co-worker (or boss) when they go home for the day?

JMB

The form is standard.

The context is simple, yet the interactivity oddly satisfies me.

It's not important that the chair is mine.

Desks and tables can be useful pedestals and shelves.

You can sit with *Jurassic Park General Audience Rating* or look through *Size Comparison Research*.

The edu dad dept tone allows it to be worked through.

Usefulness reappears, countered by *Proposal for T Chart Inscription* of fictional universes. Currently it's a clash between dad and grandma. Thought out, I'm faced with an absurd position I can't justify.

BL

Every time I see the latest development of your work, I'm impressed by the wide range of techniques and materials that you use, that all somehow come together. It's truly "intermedia," as we say. On the other hand: if I'm trying to study your work, my habitual inclination is to study it by medium (starting with the photography, for example). However, I always find that your website doesn't really encourage a visitor to sort through the work in an "academic" manner (i.e. by medium, or by year). Instead, the links are all in one place together--it's like they're all part of one big project (i.e. your work as a whole). Can you say something about how your work is presented on your website?

JMB

Categorization, like clarity, can be underwhelming. I like titles. I like abstraction. I like submission. I like repetitive acts, especially when trying to battle bad habits.

I think the website encourages navigational flânerie.

BL

Jurassic Park: I think this piece will be a prime example of defamiliarization (estrangement or in Russian, ostranenie): making the familiar strange. Can you talk a bit about this piece? Your version is 49 minutes...

JMB

Jurassic Park is rated PG-13. I re-edited it down to a G so that we could watch it together sooner than later.

August and toddlers were the original audience. It might actually be for myself and parents.. As the project advanced, audience confusion emerged as I became more concerned with my own entertainment.

The goat, dino droppings, Jeff Goldblum credit, and 1-2-3 never cease to please me.

The re-edit can be enjoyed [here](#).