

ANNABELLE

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ANNABELLE D'HUART in conversation with OMAIMA SALEM & MAX FARAGO
Photographs MAX FARAGO
Styling OMAIMA SALEM
Hair Olivier Noraz
Make-Up Ania Grzeszczuk
Set design Patricio Lima Quintana
Styling assistants Juliette Dumazy & Zoé Zanzola
Artwork courtesy of Annabelle d'Huart & Max Farago
Location Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris

Coat, veil JACQUEMUS Trousers LOEWE Turtleneck WOLFORD. Bra ERES Silk organza pintuck top, puffer lambskin joggers LOEWE



It's a cold afternoon in Paris, and artist Anna-belle ushers Omaima and Max into her studio. Carved out of the bones of a flat, the kitchen's drawers are instead full of neatly organised prints and drawings; photographs of Egypt and Donald Judd. Using her crowded hob, Anna-belle somehow manages to boil some Japanese tea for her two guests. Partly her gallerist, partly her extended family, Max knows her well, but it's the first time Omaima has met her and is full of questions

OMAIMA When did you figure out that you were an artist?

ANNABELLE Since always, but I kept it secret. When I was younger, I never said that I wanted to be one because I was so nervous that I would be bad at it. And I was raised by people who loved the arts and was surrounded by the artist friends of my grandfather, who was a great collector. Even though I learnt all these different skills and mediums over the years, I was so scared to be pretentious that I waited until I was 30 to even consider that one day I might potentially be ready to say that I am an artist.

MAX Tell us about your grandfather's house! I know he lived below Cézanne's house in Aix-en-Provence and had a window in his sitting room which was cut to mimic one of Cezanne's landscape paintings.

Omaima laughs in disbelief

ANNABELLE Yes, he had it made in the exact same measurements as Cézanne's canvas. My grandfather had some incredible art but didn't show it very much. When he did, he'd ask me to help him hang the pieces but in spots where nobody would look, so if I did make mistakes in their arrangement, it wouldn't matter so much.

OMAIMA An ex of mine had a tattoo on his arm that said, «mistakes are okay»! It's a good thing to remember... Talking of mistakes, how was school for you?

ANNABELLE I studied at Penninghen, then at École Camondo and I did a photography workshop at the ENSP in Arles. I wanted to make books, and I did a workshop with American photographer Ralph Gibson where I learned how to make a dummy book. It was then that I decided to go to NYC to photograph the American



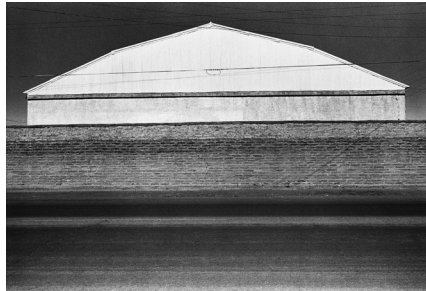
Bias-cut, 100% cotton, ANNE SHELLE ANDREWS, 2019, 110x110x110cm



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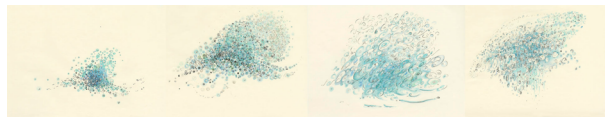
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1. *Hommage à Ruhlmann*, 2003, Sèvres, Cité de la Céramique 2. *Calcareo*, 2008, Flotsam Collection, Sèvres, Cité de la Céramique 3. Photograph: *US Air Force, Judd Foundation*, 1977. Marfa Texas 4. Portrait of Annabelle at home by Max Farago, 2023 5. *Oiseau coquillage*, 2010. Sèvres, Cité de la Céramique 6 & 7. *Déesses*, 2003 8. *Hommage à Hokusei*, 2019 9. Portrait of Donald Judd in Marfa, 1977 10 & 11. *Dunes, Monts et Merveilles*, 2017-2019.

painters, and I did my own book in that way.

OMAIMA And you photographed Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Cy Twombly, Dan Flavin etc. What made you choose them?

ANNABELLE They were very inspiring. At the time in France, we would hear about these artists but would not be able to find any documentation of them. Some French writers, like Philippe Sollers, were writing about them for the avant-garde magazine *Tel Quel*, but I couldn't understand one word of what they were writing about. I decided to go and see these people for myself and ask them, «Why do you paint only white paintings?»

OMAIMA And did you find the answer?

ANNABELLE Well, on the second day of being in the USA, Robert Ryman said to me, «The matter doesn't count a lot, what matters is the way it's done». This is what is important, it was clear enough.

Omaima takes a sip of her tea

OMAIMA Beautiful! Who introduced you to everyone there?

ANNABELLE Leo Castelli. I was also very young then, and everything was smaller and easier. When we first met, Leo Castelli looked at me and said, «Listen, you're a bit too young to go to all their studios, so the best thing would be to meet these people here in my gallery first». So in fact, I had a small desk in Leo Castelli's gallery where I worked and learnt. I was so scared, and sometimes very shy people work really fast to get it over and done with.

OMAIMA And in the '70s, you went on a road trip to our magazine's namesake Marfa, Texas, with Donald Judd?

ANNABELLE Well, yes... I visited him a couple of times there. I was a bit intimidated the first time I saw him - he was waiting in the middle of Prince Street in New York with this huge coat on, he looked like Rodin or Balzac. His Marfa space was wonderful, as it was not only where he'd stock a lot of his art but also Dan Flavin's and John Chamberlain's as he knew how fragile their pieces were and wanted to make sure they'd be safe. He was very generous and engaged as an artist.

MAX Can you tell us about Cy Twombly too, how you

went to his studio for the first time, and that idea you had of connecting archaeology and history to contemporary art?

ANNABELLE Oh, yes. I went to Rome in the August of '78 where he lived in a Renaissance palazzo. Collectors would go there, see the beautiful palace and then focus on one painting. I focused on the total space and on the conversation between archaeological pieces he collected and his paintings. I simply took photographs of these conversations, silent conversations, as if the whole thing was one installation. He loved it. He was a very humble and kind man. Whenever he'd come to Paris, he'd stay nearby at La Louisiane.

Omaima fondly recalls moments from Hotel La Louisiane, 60 Rue de Seine, a home away from home for a number of MARFAMILY members over the years

MAX Someone once told me that Cy Twombly would say to Gagosian, «You stay at the Ritz, I'll stay at the pits»!

ANNABELLE I was very lucky really, all of this would be much harder to do today.



Portrait of Donald Judd in Marfa, 1977





T-shirt MARFA
Dress ACNE STUDIOS
Bracelet ELSA PERETTI

MAX When was it that you moved to Barcelona with Ricardo Bofill?

ANNABELLE Well, I was in America from '76 to '78 and then met Ricardo, fell in love and everything changed. I went to live in Barcelona and learnt a bit about architecture and began to connect things in my head. For example, connecting a Ledoux column with a stack of Judd. I did this huge book for the Biennale de Venise in '81, another about Ricardo and then one about post-modernism - which was just beginning. That book is now studied by young architects!

OMAIMA It's very rare to meet an artist that handles so many different disciplines like you do: it's photography, sculpture, drawings, ceramics with the Atelier de Sèvres and jewelry for Yohji Yamamoto and Chanel. Is there one discipline you haven't touched but would like to try?

ANNABELLE I just did what I could, thinking that I was maybe a failure at the other stuff. I was not so secure about myself. And yes, there are many things I'd still like to try! I would love to be able to go to school and learn the oil brushwork

techniques of classic Flemish painting, for example.

OMAIMA And what space does doubt have in your work?

ANNABELLE It's constant. I've never been anything else but doubtful - it's almost my way of being in life.

MAX Even if you doubt yourself constantly, you work very consistently.

ANNABELLE I never stop working, like I never stop breathing. Everything is in preparation. And the more you advance in life, the more life shortens in a way, and the more time becomes precious. You don't want to lose your time, every day is a drop of something good or bad.

OMAIMA Your work is very much about lightness and movement also. Do you see any parallels with dance in it?

ANNABELLE Yes, that's the speed and the energy I try to translate or just transcribe. Lightness doesn't mean weakness, one has to be very strong to be light, like dancers. The more they practise, the lighter they get.

OMAIMA It takes a lot of power.

ANNABELLE During the pandemic, I created a website for myself. It was almost a personal archive. It gave me another sense of time and a panoramic view about my life of work. Every project became like an individual brick, and all those bricks were connected to make something bigger. And I failed a lot. But by the end, when I'd finished the site, I realised that I had enough bricks to maybe build something, an oeuvre, and it's just because I want to connect things. Everything feels like a new sheet of paper now, and so I'm not concerned by age anymore. I read that David Hockney was asked how old he is, and he replied, «Listen, when I'm in my studio, I'm 30 years old!» And he's so right! Fuck You!

Omaima laughs

OMAIMA Yeah, it's true. I'd even say eight years old sometimes too!... Okay, a shift in the conversation...

Annabelle notices the Hilma af Klint artwork that is the lockscreen on Omaima's phone

ANNABELLE Oh what a revolutionary artist she was. She had to paint portraits and plants in order to make a living, and that has been completely forgotten



Brown thar dress HERMÈS Cream skirt JACQUEMUS



Dresses ADELINÉ ANDRÉ
Shoes UNITED NUDE

by art historians for a couple of generations. Luckily, each generation is able to rewrite its own perception of the history of art.

MAX On my grandfather's deathbed, he said to my father, «I'll be remembered differently by everybody who knew me».

Annabelle pours everyone another cup of tea. Max sips it carefully, it's still quite hot

OMAIMA Can you tell us about your *Goddesses* sculptures?

ANNABELLE It was in 1994 when I began working on them. I was thinking a lot about femininity, and it took me six or seven years to achieve the piece called *Déesses* - 24 sculptures. I showed them in Marrakech at Menara Pavilion around a circle I had excavated and filled with water. The sculptures were all coated in *Blanc de Meudon* varnish, which I also used for my paintings, so were reflected so intensely by the ring of dark blue water.

OMAIMA They look both fragile and dangerous.

ANNABELLE Their lines of strength are also their lines of fragility.

MAX Is there an artist that you wish you'd met and photographed that you didn't?

ANNABELLE Agnes Martin, definitely. I came across her work at Pace Gallery and was so jealous. I just fell in love with what she was doing. She was living in the desert by that point, and I wrote a letter to her, but the reply just said that she wouldn't receive anybody. She had such a beautiful mind.

OMAIMA I remember her saying that if something would feel bad, she would just not look at it.

ANNABELLE Exactly, and I took that example for me. I remember the exact day that I read her reply. My life changed. I decided not to be concerned by naughty thinking and by bad people. You can go through life choosing, that's your freedom.

OMAIMA Do you still write letters?

Annabelle holds up her phone pointedly

ANNABELLE I wish. There is a problem with writing nowadays because of all these things. They steal so much time. I did keep a written journal from 1978 to 2008, though, and would make collages in them - I'll show

them to you, if you'd like.

OMAIMA I'd love that.

ANNABELLE *Diaries* can become your own house.

Annabelle leaves the room briefly, returning shortly with a small pile of her diaries from 1976. Everything is in there, Richard Serra's phone number, Donald Judd's address, the lyrics of a Stevie Wonder song she wanted to remember

OMAIMA Do you think you've changed much since you wrote these? Do you think people change at all?

ANNABELLE Not at all. Listen, I'm only saying this because I've been telling you, art is the perpetual motion of illusion. The artist's purpose is to inspire. What else can you do for anyone other than inspire them? That's what I've been trying to do my whole life, and that's not changed.

OMAIMA Do you feel that you're more in the present or in the future?

ANNABELLE I think the only sad thing is that as you get older you lose friends, but I have no time for nostalgia. We have so many things to do now.