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Interview with Jonathan Schilder Brown of LEADAPRON

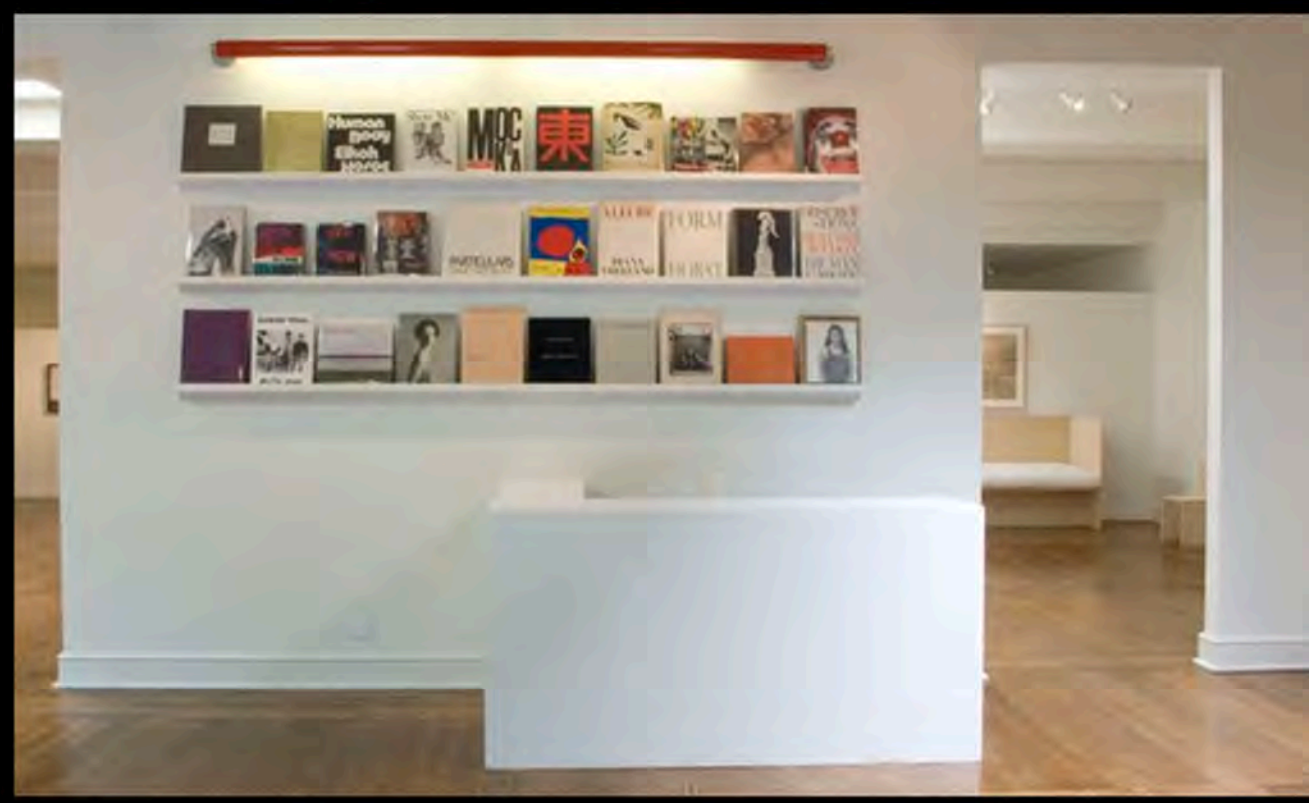
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LEADAPRON Gallery is an art and design haven on Melrose place in West Hollywood founded by Jonathan Schilder Brown. The storefront and gallery display artwork, photography and rare, out of print books, as well as minimalist furnishings that would make any interior design buff swoon. Recently I was fortunate enough to conduct a brief, email interview with Jonathan. Through our correspondence, I learned the meaning behind the name LEADAPRON and Brown's dream of one day owning the Sistine Chapel.

-Amelia Sechman

Amelia Sechman: What first inspired you to open a space like LEADAPRON Gallery?

Jonathan Brown: You know the expression "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" that was it in the beginning...I was dealing out of my home and my son was born and when clients would come over I'd hide the strollers and toys and rush my family into one of the bedrooms...it was through this behavior that the early conceptions and designs for what would later become a gallery developed...when you start your own business you have to work with your own limitations and a world of obstacles...I wanted to believe that I had a gallery..so a closet became a packing room...the dining room table a showcase...etc... Also working at home with a young child became difficult...so you could say that my boy, Theo gave me a big push to go make something of myself. I traveled a lot looking for material, did shows all over the place and when in Los Angeles would drive books around to potential clients and all the while fantasized about bringing the world to my gallery rather than the other way around.



AS: On your website, www.leadapron.net, you explain that the name is in reference to the individuals who wear lead aprons, both the builders and makers in society. You also mention the gallery's role as a guardian, which brings to mind the use of lead aprons for protection when using and x-ray. How do you feel LEADAPRON Gallery functions as a guardian for the arts?

JB: I probably should re-write that...the people that wear aprons are the workers, the people that keep the fabric of our lives intact...so the shoemaker, a waitress, the baker...these are the crafts people, the trade workers, the artists...people who work with their hands...an apron is a symbol of this proletariat workforce...but also these are the people that make the things that furnish our culture and drive the civilization...they make the things that are left behind...so when we look back at, say, ancient Egypt we look at the material works: scarabs, jewels, artifacts, emblems, fragments, hieroglyphics, treasures, etc...this is how we understand the age...a lead apron is what you wear when you get an x-ray...it is a protective shield so in essence I want to protect the work of the workers...my middle name, Schilder actually means shield bearer (and painter)...one secret meaning as well is that lead aprons are used to protect our genitals (the true organs of creation) for both men and women...I liked the name, it's memorable, is both light and dark, innocent and menacing...so it plays to contrasts and is oblique on purpose so that I don't have to be limited to selling books or art, but can expand into other avenues as well. I like the idea of offering a safe, shielded place for art...much like an ark or sanctuary or keeper of some promethean fire...protecting creativity from those forces that are like juggernauts trampling over our elysian fields...we are guardians in that we find unusual, handmade, rare objects and place them with collectors or in collections that we hope will preserve and care for them.



AS: What is your background in regards to fine art and photography books? Were you always interested in exhibiting and selling them?

JB: When I was a boy my mother used to drag me to antique shows and I remember being overwhelmed by the thousands upon thousands of things to look at: rugs, trinkets, vases, books, old chairs and perfume bottles, etc...and I had to train my eyes to zero in on things I like (or it just happened naturally) because it was dizzying to just look at everything...I used to collect little things and fill my room with them...I slept surrounded by books and so you could argue that what I do now is just a unresolved infantile neurosis...I have a background in Philosophy, Architecture, theatre directing, neuropsychology, journalism and writing. I used to sell things as a child and always enjoyed it...I'd buy fireworks in Chinatown and then sell them to my classmates or sell my old tennis clothes to underclassmen who wanted fila and ellesse or have

garage sales or parties in my basement where we would charge a dollar for admission...I think my education was looking at my mother's architectural digest and vogue magazines or my parents would drop me off at the metropolitan museum or whitney and go enjoy their day alone or I'd spend hours and hours in bookshops. I always wanted to know as much as possible about as many subjects as possible so when studying architecture I'd read literature or when studying anthropology I'd get into something else. I had very little formal education in the arts (except for architecture). It was the same in the working world: if I was working with a brain damaged individual I'd take them to the museum and at night I'd direct theatre and on the weekend work for a book dealer friend. Finally after 15 years in a field that ultimately wasn't for me I quit my job and started hustling books...and here I am 5 years later.

AS: The space seamlessly combines art and design; can you talk about what informed your interior design choices and how you feel that relates to the art on display?

JB: Thank you. It's hard to say. It's instinctive and what I like and what I can create within what I have...it's some kind of algorithm that combines many things...I could examine myself, but that takes the fun out of it. I am constantly changing things around and trying to improve them I suppose based on a sense of personal satisfaction...it's a very good question...the hardest one to answer actually. Not sure I answered it.

AS: You have an impressive collection of both art and rare objects, how do you find and decide what to include?

JB: I either try to charm my way into someone's vault or just clobber them over the head and run out the door...just kidding of course...I don't have any tricks or secrets here...the material is out there somewhere and it seems gravitate in my direction. I have just said, "I want a great collection" and it comes or I've been specific. I do work hard, travel a lot, spend time on the phone, socialize, trade, get consignments and then now I have a business so people offer me things. I've been very lucky....the first great collection I purchased was Ralph Gibson's entire library. There were 1000 signed and inscribed photo books from just about everyone from Cartier-Bresson and Brassai to Larry Clark and Robert Frank. He had some wonderful art books too...and the collections just kept coming from that point on. I just include what I like. If I like it then I give it a certain amount of attention. It makes me happy or it has some aesthetic quality that is inscrutable or chewy so that you want to make it a part of you or just be around it.



AS: Is there a particular piece or discovery that has surprised or excited you recently?

JB: There are many and I'd like to encourage you to come visit. I have many items that belonged to Jean-Michel Basquiat, great signed association copies of books, etc...I'll give you an example of something I like: I gave or sold a copy of a book to a friend and when visiting him 6 months later looked through the book. I wanted to buy it back, but he didn't want to sell. I couldn't find a nice copy to buy so I contacted the photographer Eric Kroll. The book is called Sex Objects, which is a photo documentary of sex workers in the 70's across America. We had lunch the same day and I wound up buying all of the vintage prints he had. I recently had moved to my first space at 505 N. Robertson Blvd, which was a small three room second floor studio behind a tree. I had my first show of this work there. I wound up selling many of the prints and sold the book to many including Martin Parr who had never seen it. Then I sold 15 prints and the maquette to Richard Prince's dealer who bought them for him. 2 months later I was at the Gagosian Gallery in New York and saw the images I had just sold featured in Prince's 3 million dollar canvases. I suppose I should thank my friend for not selling me that book back. That's how things happen around here. Books and objects are just energy and they come to you or bring you places...for me it's a way of living. We learn about the world by manipulating objects..that's what children do so why shouldn't we continue doing that as we age.

AS: Is there anything that you've been coveting and wish you had at LEADAPRON?

JB: The Sistine chapel, Stonehenge...just kidding.....right now I want Judd and Twombly ...a Francis Bacon painting.....a Richter.....Some rare Beuys Multiples...a Serra Sculpture...A Richard Meier House...



AS: And finally, what does the future hold for LEADAPRON?

JB: You ask good questions! What would I want for LEADAPRON or what will it become?? I would say more of the same, but time will tell. I like the title of a Damien Hirst book: I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere, with everyone, one to one, always, forever, now...so something like that.

For more information, visit www.leadapron.net