

Hornsleth's work as a window to the age that we live in

By Grant Alexander, London based writer

I first met Hornsleth due to a chance encounter. I was having a meeting with a friend that is a film editor, when suddenly he blurted out "Shit, I forgot that I have to meet some crazy Danish Artist West London in thirty minutes." I can't remember why or how I gate crashed their meeting, I merely remember walking around the ground floor of "The Hornsleth Studio", as they talked on the mezzanine fifteen feet above. I couldn't hear a word that was said, as the sound of Steve Riech bellowed around the building at an obscene decibel. I can clearly remember my ears ringing as I gazed at the spew of Hornsleth's work, which covered every inch of wall space. I must have spent 40 minutes; gazing at these substandard works, many of which featured, what I thought was a moronic slogan, "Fuck you art lovers".

In the centre of the room, a gigantic photo portrait of Hornsleth loomed. He had long dark hair and a chest long beard. It was impossible to miss the Jesus like comparison he was implying. My initial thoughts were "What kind of an ego maniac is this Man? I'm HATE him already." Once their meeting ended, he descended down the stairs. The beard was long gone and the hair was now as white as snow. After being introduced, I kept glancing from the Jesus-like portrait, to the man himself.

There was something immediately odd about the perception that I had created and the reality of this snow haired man before me. I continued glancing at the portrait as if some answer would appear, until Kristian said, "Hey, tell me, what do you honestly think of the work?" I paused for a moment, my thoughts screamed "This prick seems set on offending anyone and everyone, don't be kind to him. Give him the truth."

I proceeded to give a curt critique (much like countless ill-informed critics that I have met during the subsequent years) I shot him down with both barrels. I listed all manner of weaknesses of the work, as I ignorantly saw them at the time. Weaknesses such technique, integrity, point of view, intellectual muscle, sexualisation of women, megalomania, and a base need to provoke with zero intellectual substance to back it up. Once I had finished, I half expected to be thrown out the door; instead I was greeted with a genuine warm smile and the words "Wow, that's great! This guy is really not bad."

Over the next week I found myself at "The Hornsleth Studio" most evenings, talking for long hours about everything from filmmaking, writing, consumerism, financial markets, media, globalisation, branding, war, celebrity, western aid programmes, sexuality, economic hit-men, music, equality, ego, history, irony, mass consumption, environment, wealth and poverty.

It shocked me how he was able to force, equal amounts of hatred, affection and humour from me, while never allowing me to contradict myself. It also soon became apparent that we never spoke about Art, and he rarely stated an opinion, he simply pondered and stalked me with questions, then listened with a level of curiosity normally only found in small children that are discovering things for the first time. He would listen with absolute focus, and prompt my opinions with astoundingly simplistic questions, that would force me to trawl thorough both head and heart in

equal measures for a truthful answer. These conversations would be as intense as they would be challenging, and Hornsleth's curiosity was normally insatiable, until the moment it would occur to him that he had soaked up every drip of information that was available to him, then he would announce something along the lines of "Wow, that is great, this conversation is over!" and we would somehow seamlessly proceed to the next subject.

On one of these evenings, I entered the Studio to find him behind on the relentless schedule that he always sets for himself. "I can't waste time talking tonight I really have to finish these FOUR paintings," were his first words that he said to me. Having painted a little at art school, I ignorantly, proposed that I could "Follow your sketching and fill in some colour."

This seemed logical to me, as the blue print was already drawn out. I proceeded to show him that I understood where the colour would be applied, and that I could "Fill in the blocks of colour that would mostly be painted over anyway." I knew that my contribution would be entirely invisible, yet would save him a few hours. Curious, he humoured me. He watched attentively, as I thoughtfully and diligently began to "Colour in the blanks." Within ten seconds I could hear him laughing over my shoulder. "Not like that," he yelled, "don't hold it like that, like this!" As wielded the brush like a machete.

"It needs to be quick, cheap, thoughtless and immediate. Like the world around us, fuck this art school bullshit. It needs be from inside you!" I had another attempt, and although I knew exactly what he wanted, after a minute or two I had filled in a section that I thought looked flawless. "You should stop now," he said, "compare what you just did, to any other section, it might look the same, but up close there is something wrong. It's too precise; it's not like me. If I had to paint with that precision or dishonesty I wouldn't do it. You can't fake this shit, its like a finger print or DNA!" At that moment, the door to the world of Hornsleth came ajar, but it would be a few more weeks before I truly walked through it.

Sometime later I had arranged to meet Hornsleth at "The Hornsleth Studio" when I began to question, how, why and when I had began referring to this man as "Hornsleth" and to his office as "The Hornsleth Studio". I thought about this for about an hour as I travelled across London, and continued to ponder it, as I arrived at "Kristian's office" only to find it abandoned and its doors firmly bolted. When I called him on the phone, he assured me he'd be back in 30 minutes, while also informing me where I would find of his security codes and spare keys. After letting myself in, making a cup of tea and smoking a cigarette, I found myself sauntering around the Studio gazing at the spew of work dripping from the walls.

From that day to the present, that is still the only occasion that I can recall, that Hornsleth was not true to his word. One cigarette became ten, a single cup of tea became four and thirty minutes became four hours. At that moment I was rather unaware of how much time had passed; I was too busy being physically assaulted by almost a thousand pieces of work that dripped from every inch of the wall, screaming, "Fuck you art lovers". Suddenly, a strange realisation began rising inside me. I slowly began to recognise many of the themes of our past conversations, depicted within the

individual pieces on the walls. I thought of our conversations regarding globalization, mass consumption, fast food & throwaway culture, and I could clearly connect the dots. I could see why, he explicitly instructed me to paint with a technique that “needs to be quick, cheap, thoughtless and immediate. Like the world around us.”

I began to understand why he used biro, acrylic and spray paint as opposed to oil stick, gold leaf or diamond dust. As he later explained to me, “If I was going to be that pretentious, I’d really use the best stuff... Virgin cum!”

Slowly, I began to see the hatred, affection and humour, which he had conjured from our conversations, oozing from the walls. As clear as this was to me, it was far too complex to be found in any single piece, but was clearly recognisable when the entire wall was viewed as a single mosaic. As this became clear to me, the work began to pulse from the walls.

I could see all our conversations about sexuality, fame, globalisation, branding, decadence, wealth, poverty, celebrity, western aid programmes, sexualisation & objectification of women, western foreign policy, branding and advertising thumping from this gigantic mosaic. It was as if the work had morphed into a strange window to the age that we live in. I realised then that the work was not to be judged by the singular piece, but could only truly be seen as a mosaic that represented the tragic ugliness, beauty and ambiguity of the both the world, and of the man whom had depicted this.

I was exhilarated by this revelation; I needed to talk to him. I called him on his phone, but there was no response, I waited with excitement to tell him all the things that I had just discovered in his work, and how it needed to be viewed, but he never answered, nor arrived. After a couple more hours, I cleaned up my cups of tea and cigarette butts, locked the doors and left.

My troubled mind pounded the entire way home with a burning need to tell somebody about what I had just discovered. I tried calling Hornsleth the last time, convinced I needed to share this revelation, before it faded from my mind. I thought to myself “He needs to see what I’ve seen tonight!” Suddenly, it occurred to me, HE ALREADY HAS! All these connections and head splitting thoughts, he already knows, why else would have spent many thousands of hours, painting this stuff? I pondered how deep does this throbbing go inside his head? How long has it been there? How do you get this shit out of your head? Until it occurred to me, this shit has always been in his head, this is how he sees the world.

This is what it is like to live inside his mind. This is what it is like to have a burning compulsion to express every thought in your mind, before it fades. This is what it is like to be a true artist, not just a filmmaker. I’ve always believed that Art is a window to the world. Hornsleth’s work when viewed as a mosaic is more than just a window to the world, it is also a window in to the mind of Kristian Von Hornsleth, which is infinitely more fascinating than the world of art could ever be, which forces me to reluctantly agree with his central tenet, fuck you art lovers!

