

# whitewall

CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Ewan Gibbs

By Lily Alexander | March 7, 2009



Ewan Gibbs, 2009 Commissioned Artist for the Armory Show, photograph courtesy of Alessandro Raho

I sat down in a not-so-quiet corner of the fair to speak with Ewan Gibbs, the Armory Show's 2009 Commissioned Artist. While sipping champagne from one of the lovely plastic glasses on offer, Ewan talked to me about the reasoning behind his choice of iconic subject matter, his reference to historical styles, and the frustrations of critical misinterpretation.

WHITEWALL: Tell me about your commissioned work for the Armory Show this year?

# lora reynolds gallery

EWAN GIBBS: I was asked to make a benefit print which goes towards the Pat Hearn and Colin de Land Cancer Foundation and Acquisition Fund at The Museum of Modern Art. Because I usually make a series of work, I decided to make five sets of four prints, rather than five single prints. I chose iconic images like the Brooklyn Bridge and the Empire State Building.

WW: You originally made a series of New York drawings, before you were chosen by the Armory Show. What made you choose the city as a subject for the series?

EG: I started off early-on using images from travel brochures. When I was in college I would go travel agents and get free brochures. I would cut out all the pictures and use the found images as a subject for my drawings. Then I adopted these stitching techniques and patterns.

I was also trying to make imagery that wasn't about me. I wanted something really generic. The work is about perception, how an image is made, and how we look at it. My work relates to photography without being overly graphic. I am not trying to mimic photography but am trying to find a language that has the same logic as photography.

People wanted to read isolation or alienation in my work. But that wasn't what it was about.

WW: Everyone talks about the pointillist nature of your work. Is this an important reference for you?

EG: I do feel rooted in the tradition of twentieth-century art, especially impressionism and post-impressionism. But I also think my work is quite "pop-y". It is popular culture and it is iconic. And the language is also related to conceptual art and minimalism. I do come at it from an art historic angle.

WW: Your drawings show a painstakingly, detailed process, with the grids and tiny, repetitive strokes of the pencil which eventually come to form the image. Can you tell me about this process?

EG: The process is a means to an end. To make an image the way I want to make it, it just so happens that I have to go through this process. People want to know how long it takes, which is an obvious question to ask an artist. I feel people want to get their monies worth out of you, like you're a craftsmen, and then they can tell people about how long it took me to do that work. There is something quite enjoyable in that for me. I also like it because it is a honey trap. You suck people in closer, and then they can actually think about the way that the image was made. I don't want to give them an outlet to go off on some story about wind-swept women, or some such topic. Because everything I do is visible, and the process is right there in front of you.