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‘There’s All These Rules That Aren’t Written’: Watch Jacolby Satterwhite Navigate the Pressures of a Flourishing Art Career

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

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Production still from the Art21 "New York Close Up" film, "Jacolby Satterwhite Dances with His Self." © Art21, Inc. 2013.

Artist Jacolby Satterwhite’s first large-scale monographic exhibition is opening at Carnegie Mellon University’s Miller Institute for Contemporary Art on August 14, marking a major milestone in the artist’s career.

But big shows like this aren’t all glory. Satterwhite now counts dozens of exhibitions to his name all over the world, including at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, the Gwangju Biennale, and Pioneer Works in Brooklyn (where he lives), and they take a ton of work.

In an exclusive interview filmed as part of Art21’s New York Close Up series in 2014, the artist discussed what it was like having to make work for multiple shows at once without draining himself of creativity.

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“Knowing when to stop, knowing when to say no, it’s just all these rules that aren’t written down for you,” Satterwhite said, “and you have to figure it out for to yourself through trial and error.”

When the video was filmed, the artist had recently transitioned from painting to working in performance and new technology, using animation and green screens to create immersive, futuristic videos. While working toward deadlines for Art Basel and Sundance New Frontier, Satterwhite got another career-defin



Jacolby Satterwhite, *Reifying Desire 6* (2014). © Jacolby Satterwhite.

To prepare, Satterwhite adopted a grueling work schedule that involved lots of Red Bull and peanuts, and sleeping on his studio floor.

Speaking to Art21, Stuart Comer, who invited Satterwhite to participate in the Whitney show, said of the artist’s work: “It’s not just technology for technology’s sake. It’s really embedded in many layers of intellectual and personal discovery and inquiry.”

Ultimately, Satterwhite managed to fulfill his simultaneous engagements, and continues to make work that is imbued with his innate DIY aesthetic, while pushing the boundaries of new technology.

“I’m feeling, like, okay... more ambitious, more stuff to do, more shows to accomplish. I want to wrinkle, and get ugly, and get fat from peanut allergies, making my art.”

Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21’s New York Close Up series, below. “Jacolby Satterwhite: Spirits Roaming on the Earth” is on view at the Miller ICA at Carnegie Mellon University from August 14 through December 5, 2021.