Don’t Piss on Me and Tell Me It’s Raining
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A Bad at Sports project

apexart
291 church street
new york, ny 10013
T: 212.431.5270  F: 646.827.2487
ph@apexart.org  www.apexart.org

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Richard: Just talk it through? Is that too postmod-
ern?

Duncan: I don’t know. Well, what do you want to
do with the apexart essay?

Richard: Are we recording? Is this ironic or is this
not ironic?

Duncan: I don’t know if it’s ironc or not, but yes,
we’re recording.

Richard: I think that we should talk about the
philosophy of the program. Do a little bit about how it
got started. Sort of do the compressed version of
that talk we did the other day. And by “we,” I mean
you, mostly. The royal “we.”

Duncan: [Laughs.] So you want to start with...?

Richard: Well, I think originally, we were just screw-
ing around, having a conversation, being dumb-
asses, and I think it’s evolved into something more
rich, with more depth and more seriousness. I mean,
I think, at this point, we’re creating an audio
archive of what’s going on in the art community, or
at least the art community we have access to in this
time and place. And the place has expanded into
more cities than it was originally. It’s now in
New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, London,
Switzerland, Sweden.

So I think it’s an examination, like a time capsule of
what’s going on now, and that we’ll look at this
project twenty, thirty, fifty years from now—at least
on a personal level—and see an interesting history
of what was going on now.

Duncan: Do you think we already do that? Do you
think, when you look back on the programming
that we put together five years ago, it seems kind
of strange? Like, what we thought was urgent at
that moment versus what turned out to be kind of
urgent?

Richard: Oh, it’s embarrassing. [Laughter.] I listen to
those early shows and groan. We were very flip
about it at first, only when people started to list us
on their resumes and we started to get feedback,
either...deliriously angry or deliciously happy about
what we were doing...only then did we realize that
we had any sort of an audience and that we might
need to be conscientious about how we were doing
things.

Duncan: Take it vaguely seriously?

Richard: Seriously? I don’t want to cast it that we’re
too serious, but...I don’t remember exactly when
the moment was, but I do remember all the sudden
thinking, wow, this project is really a lot bigger than
me. [Laughter.] It’s not any one person or two people
or anything. It’s not you, Amanda and me; it’s not
the blog; it’s not Meg and Claudine; it’s not any
bureau. There is such an array of ideas and opinions
brought to the table. And I think it’s a good, func-
tioning collective, in a way that few are. The whole
is better than the sum of its parts.

Duncan: So what do you think binds us all together?

Richard: A Midwestern work ethic, maybe? [Laughter.]
A slightly Marxist view of things? Boy, that’s tough
to say. I think it’s earnestness, at the end of the day.
If you contrast the people who’ve stuck with the
project for any length of time...and the people
who’ve left the project, the difference is earnest-
ness. The people who worked with us with purely
self serving motivation were a bad fit, and it was
obvious. So I think, at the end of the day, it’s people
who give a shit. The give-a-shit factor is not to be
underestimated. Most people aren’t willing to give
of themselves to their individual detriment in fur-
therance of a greater good. We have lots of people
who can work toward a common goal, I think that’s
really rare.

Duncan: Do you think you and I are even entitled
to speak for the entirety of Bad at Sports anymore?
Got question?

Richard: No, I don't actually. You and I (recently) had a conversation about this... we talked about how the blog has grown to a size and level of complexity that it doesn’t make sense to spin off a separate organization without them. The blog has become so much more than you or I ever imagined. We always had aspirations of having the blog really take off on its own, but it has transcended our greatest aspirations with its level of depth and complexity.

Neither one of us has ever been comfortable even pretending to be in charge. I don’t think that there’s a leader. You and I happened to be the first two involved and happened to be the people who were on-air most of the time. I think that we end up doing this stuff by default. Meg (chief blogger) puts in more work than you or me. She should be getting paid.

Richard: [Laughs.] Well, right now, you and I are literally phoning it in, so... [Laughter.]

Richard: As opposed to what—any other day? [Laughter.]

Richard: So when you think about Bad at Sports' history...

Richard: Isn’t it funny how you’re interviewing me?

Richard: We could certainly have. Is not that what we’re doing, or am I just reading a series of interesting anecdotes and you get to enjoy the pleasure of being in that person’s company. But they’re not still playing, You Bet Your Life. They already won.

Richard: Yeah, I don’t know that the people... I mean, in terms of “at stake”, I don’t know, entirely, what you mean by that. I don’t know that we’re going to have any appreciable effect on anybody’s existence.

Richard: Oh, yeah, and that’s not what I mean. I just mean that it’s not as interesting to go through what has already been polished.

Richard: Right, that’s where the project started and where it ends, providing things that the listeners might not be able to get otherwise. Like, Jeff Wall, who is a great interview and I really appreciated his work throughout that interview—but Jeff Wall’s been interviewed 800illion other times before and we weren’t bringing anything terribly new to the table.

But Jim Lutes, on the other hand, maybe not as frequently interviewed about art, or how much we art fans throw down with the art superstars.

Richard: Fan boy maybe, but throwing down with the superstars... One of the things that I think is really interesting is how rarely you or I feel compelled to go after the super-duper rock star big names. It’s not that we couldn’t possibly get access to them. In a lot of ways, those people aren’t the most interesting to us. We’re interested in the mid-career and emerging artists and curators, where most of the real action is.

Duncan: That’s fair to say but it isn’t always true. Right? Like, I love Jeff Wall and pursued that to the end.

Richard: Oh, sure. But it’s not... like, star-fucking is not our goal.

Duncan: [Laughs.] But why is that? The reason that we don’t go after more superstars is because it’s not really a stakke for them anymore. They’re already set up. They know what they do; everybody else knows what they do.

And outside of the rare person, like a Liam Gillick, who works in this very sort of confounding way, nothing’s revealed through that. It’s because it’s not something that’s new and exciting for us, also we’ve done a number of speaking engagements lately, and we are developing new media content to add to the blog. What do you see as the future of this project?

Duncan: That’s funny, because I feel like few years ago, it was kind of the opportunity to do something that forces us to sort of reconsider the context in which we work, and what we’re doing, and examine “who we think we are.” And I’m not sure who we’re going to emerge as post-apexart show. I think that if we look at it coming in, we say, well, we’re sort of self-styled journalists. We’re sort of like, but are not really, journalists, but sort of... We take it seriously. We don’t go out to quote gossip, and everything we say is true to the best of our knowledge.

And I think...I don’t know. I think there are so many ways it could sort of splinter or fracture, or so many possibilities that the apexart opportunity is making apparent to us, right? What is Bad at Sports about? How would the collective do an art show? So we came up with a few things.

One is a kind of “curio cabinet/archive” space. A kind of “these are the people in our neighborhood.” These are the people that we’ve connected with; these are the people who we feel are meaningful enough to throw part of our lives behind. Then there are some live interviewing setups and a way to open up the extras of the show to everybody, to say, “we have questions and we find our answers publicly, and you have questions and we can find YOU answers for them.”

We’ll “keep on keepin’ on” in one form or another, but I think the blog will continue to be a bigger and bigger resource. Think that’s what we’re trying to do is develop an archive itself. I think the question for me is, what is this thing that we’ve made manifest? What do we mean by doing this? What are we enacting when we do Bad at Sports? Maybe this is just that we’re jerks. Maybe we’ll continue to be jerks.

Richard: And I want to say one final thing as we wrap up: Bad at Sports really wants to be in the Whitney, we really want to be in the Venice Biennale.

Duncan: [Laughter.]

Richard: And let’s not rule out Documenta. So if any of you out there have the ability to make any of those dreams come true, yes.

-Richard Holland and Duncan MacKenzie © 2010