

Rabit on standing up for your work



December 14, 2017 -

As told to T. Cole Rachel, 2285 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Identity](#), [Process](#), [Independence](#), [Anxiety](#).

Do you have a regular routine or a way that you like to work?

Yeah. It's basically a perpetual state of having the computer open, which sometimes amounts to not having much of a life. The process goes through phases, but generally I just make things all the time. After a few months, I will sit down with everything and see how it connects emotionally, what the music might be saying and what I want it to say. Trying to quantify and explain what is mostly a very subconscious process is difficult and ambiguous. Sometimes I have a motivator, like a specific deadline, but often I just have the realization that I really need to do something with all the material I've assembled because it's getting out of control.

For example, when the computer says it's full. I'll have this vision that it's going to break down and then it'll all be lost. It sounds pretty crazy, but in a way that's when I know I need to do something—when my computer's full. That's why my new album is kind of hard to explain to people. I had so many ideas since I made *Communion*. I pulled everything together from creating every day and tried to tie it all up with a bow, so to speak.

My primary means of self-expression and creating always involved things that were really personal and involved really low numbers—like making zines or writing graffiti. This makes sharing my music feel very complicated. I spent a lot of time making this thing—I kind of love it, kind of hate it sometimes, love some parts of it more than others sometimes—and now I'm supposed to share it with thousands of people and always appear like I feel great about it and that I think it's the best thing on earth, when sometimes I do feel that way and sometimes I don't. That's a challenge.

That's really where I am right now. I'm trying to find a healthier pattern for getting the ideas out into the world and not letting the work just build up or continually snowball until it *has* to be done or until it feels out of control. I'm trying to find a little bit of a healthier flow. But as of right now, I just create every day and when the spark of an idea to tie things together hits me, I'll be like, "Okay, this batch of things goes here. These ideas go together."

If you're making somewhat ambiguous electronic music that isn't focused around lyrics, is not necessarily beat-driven, and the purpose of which is not necessarily about making people dance, it's fascinating to see the ways in which people can respond to it. People can project so many different things onto the material. It must be wild sometimes to hear what people think.

Oh yes. My partner really thinks it's funny because some of the images and ideas that people have about who I am from the music I make, versus who I am in real life, can be so wildly different. People hear something with a certain tone or a certain mood and they automatically lump me into a group subscribing to a certain idea or religion. They make assumptions about my intent. I like the idea that the interpretations are malleable and I can play around with that. I like the idea that I can keep the ideas kind of secret, that I don't have to tell people what anything I make really means.

In a way, that's what I get the most satisfaction from—knowing that there's people who are connecting the dots for themselves and making up their own interpretations. It might be like a little bit wrong or it might be completely wrong, but they can get this feeling of everything connecting in some ways and develop their own interpretation of what they think that is.

You put this record out yourself, which allows you to make the statement you want to make without any kind of compromise. Why was that so important with this record in particular?

I really have to thank Robin (Carolann) at Tri-Angle for helping this album happen, even though it's not on Tri-Angle. I was making so much stuff over the course of two years and when I'd share it with him he was struggling to see how all of this material was connected. It's worth noting that what ended up on the record was cut down from over 50 songs, or something crazy like that.

He kind of forced me to figure out what statement I was trying to make and to figure it out all by myself, which was something that I really needed to do. The record was a document of me trying to process a lot of issues, including a lot of childhood stuff. I had to come to terms with the fact that not everyone was going to get it. There's also a lot of power in sticking up for your ideas. This is my idea. I did the entire thing myself. And that's it. My conversations with him basically forced me to really figure out what I was trying to say, and I don't think I would have done that beforehand. If there had been a label that was just like, "Oh, yeah, sure, just send us anything and we'll release it," it wouldn't have ended up the way it is.

So there was this moment where it was like, "Oh, okay, so there's nowhere for my album to come out? Awesome." So I started reaching out to other labels and only one, *Sacred Bones*, actually responded to me. Every single other fucking label didn't even reply. I'm extremely motivated by competition and, in a way, that was an extreme motivator. As someone who releases music and runs their own label, I was honestly really pissed. I was just like, you could at least respond back to me, because these were people who are signing artists that I originally released. It made me look deeper into the scene or the community that we allegedly all belong to.

As a result of all this, I also had to get a lot more cunning and ruthless and stop being so friendly about the way I thought about things, which I think ultimately is positive, because as much as people and articles want to project this as a community, it's a business. So I got a little bit pissed, but it also really made me ask myself: What am I doing that's rubbing people the wrong way? What is my place in this culture? What is my place in this business?

My experience with *Les Fleurs Du Mal* gave me an opportunity to stand back and consider several things. For example, it was interesting to see what people do with a queer artist when they think they can extract something that will make their brand seem valuable to people of color. It's interesting to see when labels are only signing acts that are people of color but yet, none of the people that work at the label are people of color. In a way, being shut out with my own work—which, thankfully I'm capable of releasing myself—really opened my eyes to the institutional, systemic problems with the way things are done.

It feels like a very long way from making a zine and like going to Kinko's, making 50 copies, and then giving them to people for free, which is what I did when I was a kid. I've always tried to release music by people because I thought they were interesting and I liked their vibe and felt they had something to say, not because they represented some demographic that I could try and capitalize on. I realize that not everyone works that way.

In a way, it was a bit of a downer to see how transparent and awful the business can be, but I think we need to know how things operate in order to create a new system. I think the people that are fans of my label know that when we release something, we're not releasing it because we need black people or queer people on our label, otherwise we'll look bad. That's some bullshit and I think people can tell the difference. So yes, the whole experience with making and trying to release this album has been really difficult for me in some ways, but it's also been one of the most positive things that could have happened... even though that sounds kind of crazy.

When you're making music that is not necessarily ostensibly about your sexuality, though maybe part of it is, how important is it that people make queerness a part of the conversation?

That's a good question because during the original wave of press that I did for my first album, there was a lot of that embedded in the interviews. The album alluded to a lot of Catholic concepts, which is the way that it was brought up. So sexuality came up and it became a tagline, which I understand is kind of necessary just to like get people to click on a story about someone who they know nothing about. I want to say it's complicated but I don't really even know that it is. I think it depends who's saying it and why they're saying it.

When something is just chalked onto the front of something like a descriptor—gay artist, queer artist—and it's used to sell something or to describe something, I think people can tell

when it's kind of unimportant or when maybe it's being used just to get clicks. There are friends of mine for whom their queerness is intrinsically linked to what they do, because the world is the way it is and because their queerness is so visually upfront. For certain trans and queer people who present in certain ways, they basically have no choice in the matter.

I think visibility is important. As someone who might be described as a straight-passing person, to say I'm queer or to let people know, "Hey, by the way I'm a fucking faggot, so don't talk like that," is really powerful and necessary. When you blend in and you look like everyone else, people sometimes take for granted that you share their terrible fucking beliefs with you and sometimes they need a check. This feels especially important in a place like Texas, which is where I live. People just see a white guy with tattoos and they make certain assumptions.

It's important that we be mindful of the context of the situation. It comes down to how each person operates in the world. A lot of people are stuck in situations where they are dealing with real world fears where they could lose their job or something. I don't necessarily have to worry about that because I'm in an industry where right now queerness is commodified. I'm generally a very reserved, quiet person, so having these sorts of conversations and confrontations is not easy for me, but I think if everyone worked up enough courage to stop hiding and to stop allowing certain things that aren't okay to keep happening, we might experience more real on-the-ground change. So even though talking about stuff like this is uncomfortable, I know it's important. I'm the kind of person who would rather let the work speak for itself most of the time. I'm the kind of person who would prefer most of the time to never actually leave my house; but standing up about stuff like this—or, you know, advocating for my own creative work—is a way to confront my own fears and to keep figuring out how to exist.

In addition to touring in support of your own record, you collaborated with Björk on a song for her album *Utopia*. Even though the creation and release of your record has been arduous, this must feel like a very validating moment, yes?

Yeah. I've had a lot of projects up in the air for a long and now they are all starting to land. The song that I did with Bjork has been a long time in the making and it feels like an important piece of the puzzle. Going out and performing feels like the completion of the process, which really needs to happen in order for me to feel okay with it.

I've gotten a little bit of feedback on the album, and you know how creating is—it's complicated. You want to say, "Oh, I do this for me. I don't really give a fuck what you think." But that feeling changes pretty rapidly for me. At some point I'm sure I'll feel a different way about the album than I feel now. Creating, when there's an audience, is a relationship. It's a kind of the secret dialogue. I feel like there a lot of little things embedded and hidden in this album, in the sounds. It's all part of an ongoing conversation and I realize that I need people to hear that in order to feel like it's complete and I can move onto the next thing.

Rabit recommends:

[Trances People Live: Healing Approaches in Quantum Psychology](#) by Margaret O. Ryan and Stephen Wolinsky

Shyne - [Shyne](#) (album)

Khalil Gibran - [Satan](#)

[Demystifying the Out-of-Body Experience: A Practical Manual for Exploration and Personal Evolution](#) by Luis Minero

Brume - [Fuck Your Sun!](#)

[Name](#)

Rabit

[Vocation](#)

Musician, Producer

