

## Interview with Boy Kong

By Sara Zielinski

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I recently sat down with Boy Kong to talk with him about his practice and his unicorn piece in Gitler & \_\_\_\_\_'s current show The Hunt of the Unicorn. Boy Kong was visiting from his hometown of Orlando where he currently lives and works.

**As a self-taught artist, do you learn from other artists, in person, or through their work, or in other ways?**

That's how I've learned so far, from other artists. Once I started meeting people in the art scene in Orlando I started getting curious about what they were doing and their techniques so I picked stuff up from them. I collected a bunch of skills and came home and figured out which I liked best and assembled it together. I think that's really important. Sometimes people feel like they have to exclude themselves from everybody so that they can get a more real version of themselves when they make art but I think that without artists around you there won't be any growth. But with you and everybody else, what you can know is endless.

I try to discover new artists that I like and bookmark them in my head but I'm a scatterbrained person. They all affect me, sometimes without even knowing it. You pick up something from everybody. Being around other artists promotes growth. If you use your own brain and get inspired by other artists, your stuff will always be different.



**Talking about learning from other artists, I'm curious about your series in direct response to gallery and museum shows.**

The title was SAMESUN. It was related to all the gallery and museum shows I saw in New York. I learned about a lot of new artists through that series. Alice Neel stood out as one that I was really inspired by. I really like her work. I could relate to how free she painted. I watched videos of some of the artists painting and I'd look at videos of them painting or interviews or read about them. Reading or listening to how they did it and about their lives, you kind of feel like you could embody them and have their spirit with them while you paint. I named it SAMESUN because some of them are alive or some of them have passed away but we're all artists under the same sun.

**How are you inspired by Ukiyo-e?**

I'm inspired by their line works and their block prints. There's something about line work that's like how I got started with art. It's the basics of drawing. Seeing the lines in the block prints is really simplistic but it gets the point across. It's so powerful to me with just the thin lines of the block print. There's so much character to some of the things they draw. When I draw I try to mimic their line techniques or the

placement of lines to make the characters or objects seem more lively while still being two-dimensional. I'm impressed by their colors too. The whole thing inspires me.

It's also part of Asian culture, which is easy for me to relate to. When I first started making art I didn't do much with Asian culture, but then as I grew older I was looking at my culture and trying to make works based off of it. It's helped my work stand out in Orlando. The Ukiyo-e prints are Japanese which is close to my culture which is Chinese and Vietnamese.

Boy Kong studio shot, 2015 (photo courtesy of Boy Kong)

**Tell me about your use of color. You use a lot of inviting colors and depict surreal scenes.**

Neons and pastels. I think the only reason why I make objects or make art is because of the colors. Not necessarily the objects or the subjects....If I want to draw something with green, I figure out what I can draw that's green. It starts with the color first.

Neon is like a really bright unnatural color. So I like to pair that with something natural like wood. Wood is really natural until you throw a neon on it and that gives it a sickly vibe like it's produced in a way, it's unnatural to the system or something. It's just strange, almost taboo when the neon is next to something natural.

I like pastels because they have a happy vibe. With a pastel, it allows me to create more cruel or harsh imagery. I can use imagery that's less edible, kind of strange, and pair it with a pastel so it'll even out. The pastel makes you comfortable but then the subject will be harsh so it balances out. The whole purpose originally was to catch people with the color from a distance. That was the honey of the whole piece, attracting the bees because they smelled the honey.



Unheard Prayers, Acrylic on wood, 2012

**The Corrupted Alphabet 2 was the first piece of yours that I saw.**

I like drawing animals. With humans its okay but there's a certain characteristic with animals that I really like. And their coloring is much more interesting. I'm inspired to draw animals because of their natural pigments and patterns. The Corrupted Alphabet came from the ABC charts in school that I saw where the letters were paired with different animals. I made mine in a way where it wouldn't be hung in an elementary school. For the one you saw, I paired each letter and animal with a food too. I made it easier for myself by saying, "Last time I did a zebra, this time I have to make it a zucchini zebra." It made my job easier because it would dictate the color. I thought it would be fun and the whole concept would be kind of strange.





**Tell me about your piece in the upcoming show at Gitler & \_\_\_\_\_.**

All the artists were assigned a unicorn tapestry from The Cloisters to remake in our own way, to paint it or sculpt it or whatever. I picked The Unicorn Defends Itself. I wanted that one because the unicorn is stabbing a dog. The subject was pretty cool for me. It's one of the climax pieces.

I got back into color with that one, I sort of finished the whole piece so I could color this one duck that's in the corner. [Laughs]



More of Boy Kong's work can be found at [www.boykongart.com](http://www.boykongart.com) and [www.gitlerand.com](http://www.gitlerand.com). The Hunt of the Unicorn is up at Gitler & \_\_\_\_\_ through January 23.



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