

Quick on the Draw, Donald Robertson Takes on East Hampton  
by Jennifer Landes

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Those who long for the days of Andy Warhol's Factory but were too young or not fabulous or freaky enough to experience it, will want to trek on down to Eric Firestone's Newtown Lane gallery to get a sense of that lost world.

Donald Robertson, who is also known by his Instagram handle, donalddrawbertson, is a nonstop art-making tour de force. But rather than delegate or take the artist's hand out of the work, he opts instead for a constant stream of self-generated and mostly painterly images taken from the quotidian objects that surround him.

It helps that he is the head of creative development for Bobbi Brown, a division of Estee Lauder, and that his inspiration is often from the fashion world. Yet, just as frequent in his work are the leaf bags, cereal boxes, Whole Foods shopping bags, and pizza boxes so common to suburbia, in his case, Larchmont, where he and his wife, Kim Gieske, raise five children from a recent set of twins up to 18.

While a family portrait was on display in the gallery, much of what drew the eye on a visit on Thursday were the often wry fashion world references and Mr. Robertson himself, who has taken over the gallery as a mobile studio, knocking out work as it struck him. It is fascinating to watch his process, with paint, markers, tape, surrounding him, set up on a Ping-Pong table and putting up new drawings like a short-order cook with customers lining up virtually through his trendabl account or in the flesh, like his friend Lisa Perry, who stopped by to assert her claim on several works in the gallery.

Mr. Robertson said Ms. Perry was the one who introduced Mr. Firestone to him. He wanted a gallery space, and she recognized a similar aesthetic through her acquaintance with Mr. Firestone, as retail neighbors in East Hampton Village. The two hit it off immediately.

"I went to his studio and a few days later backed up a truck and loaded the whole thing up," Mr. Firestone said.

So much was taken, including Mr. Robertson's art supplies, that he said that he had to come to East Hampton in order to do his work. "He kept showing up at 4:30 in the morning to be let in to the gallery," Mr. Firestone said. "Eventually," he said, pantomiming the bleary-eyed process to let him in, "I gave him his own key."

The artist's genius with paint and tape notwithstanding, what really makes his work pop is the immediate reaction to the sights and scenes around him. It can be his World Cup-inspired series of bikini-bot-



Donald Robertson making art at his Ping-Pong table work desk at Eric Firestone Gallery. Jennifer Landes photos.

tomed models with the flags of countries who have teams of interest like Brazil, Portugal, and Germany (and, of course the U.S.) or the village traffic control officers who march by the gallery window hourly.

What is most engaging, however, is his happy and welcoming persona, something that manages to come through even on his Instagram account, which has more than 52,000 followers. He may have fans such as Carine Roitfeld, the former editor of French Vogue, but “I don’t want to get too exclusive,” he said, particularly in the art world which, he said, had a similar insider-outsider vibe.



The Drawbertson take on Hermes Birkin bags

His has found that the instant adoration of the social media cognoscenti has carried over to his day job at the cosmetics giant Estee Lauder. “I have this whacked-out aesthetic that’s not focused grouped,” he said. At first, the corporate powers didn’t understand it, but seeing the response has caused them to rethink how to promote their brands, his drawings of pouty and colorful full sets of lips leading the way.

Mr. Robertson was also one of three founders of MAC Cosmetics, which raised \$260 million in funding for AIDS-related charities through its VivaGlam line. In addition, he launched Marie Claire in America and was responsible for a redesign of Glamour magazine.

His understanding of fashion history, including the fluid illustrations so popular in 1930s magazines, informs his quick-stroke, summary application of paint. There is energy and brio here in the stroke of the artist, an element no less interesting than the packing tape, cereal boxes, and Louis Vuitton logos that also populate his work.

The show will be up at Firestone until Wednesday.