

## **Rene Capone interviewed via email by Paul Sendziuk**

**San Francisco, USA, 19 April 2005**

*This interview was conducted via a series of emails in April 2005. The resulting transcript was approved by Rene on 19 April 2005.*

**Paul Sendziuk: Where do your ideas come from?**

Rene Capone: I look at making art like telling stories. The greatest themes in life are explored through art. Love, hate, jealousy, fear, anger, passion and anything else you can imagine. I believe an artist's job is to tell these stories.

**Which medium do you prefer, drawing or painting?**

Drawing and using water based mediums because I know how the water wants to move and I can manipulate it. I think I might actually be better at drawing, but I just can't stop painting.

**I think the two mediums come together beautifully in your piece *Prodigal Lover*, which is quite removed from your usual imagery. What is this work about?**

At the risk of being way too honest, it is about a lover who lied to me about being a prostitute and having a sugar daddy and I was left very confused and lost. I made it during the rainy season in San Francisco a few years back.



Rene Capone, *Prodigal Lover*, pencil and watercolour on paper, 22" x 30", 2000.

## How long does a painting usually take?

A couple of weeks. The beginning takes much longer than the end. When you're about to put it all together [at the end], that is usually pretty quick. Sometimes the hardest part is knowing when to stop, or when you should come back to it later, so that you don't mess up something wonderful. Sometimes if you keep going, and you lose concentration, it starts to look bad.

**I'm intrigued by the painting 'Who is it, when did it happen, and where?' [see overleaf] Your website suggests that the picture embodies some questions: 'Why do we judge ourselves, why do we sacrifice for what we believe in, why do we survive?' To me, these questions, and the naked torsos of the young men in the picture, seem to refer to the precarious nature of sex in the time of AIDS.**

It is not necessarily about AIDS. When I was creating that picture, I was thinking about how some people destroy themselves while others somehow survive and move forward.



Rene Capone, *Who is it, when did it happen, and where?*, acrylic, 30" x 30", 2002.

**A couple of your works, such as 'Reflections of the War', directly reference the AIDS epidemic. Can you tell me about them?**

I hated 'Reflection of the War' so much that I destroyed it! It was so dark and sad. Two other pictures, 'Fountain Full of Blood' and 'Safety', which are both loose self-portraits, express the way that I was being pushed into a category that I didn't necessarily want to be in and didn't see coming. I got over those feelings, but those images I created are very moving.



Rene Capone, *Safety*, watercolour on paper, 22" x 30", 2000.

**Artists were among the first to respond to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, creating some important and memorable work (Albert Winn's photographs, Keith Haring's paintings and Felix Gonzales Torres' billboards come to mind). Yet there has been almost no response to the recent 'spike' in HIV infections among young gay men. Why is this so?**

It has been going on for so long now I think people just become 'over it'. They forget. Art cannot stop the epidemic. Art just documents what people were confronting at a particular time.

### **So art can't save lives in the age of AIDS?**

Maybe, it can make someone stop and think, but personally I have never made art that would save a life...only show someone their own reflection.

### **Has the classification of your work as 'gay art' and 'homoerotic' hindered or helped you?**

It's hard to get work shown when you draw naked people. If you draw a boy naked, usually no-one wants anything to do with it. Galleries shy away from overtly erotic art in general. But my art is not really so much erotic as it is 'gay' – it reflects who I am. In any case, I sell my art through my website and my studio, and I've learned that one can have a very good art career without having to deal with a gallery.

### **I believe that you often paint your friends, or use them as models for your pictures. Have they ever had a negative reaction to your work that has put your relationship in jeopardy?**

So far I haven't experienced any problems. I only ask friends who I know are excited about being involved in the art making process. I'm sure some of them have thought I was crazy, but they keep it to themselves!

### **Who do you imagine as your audience?**

In the years I have been making art - and that is all I have even done - I've developed a large fan base. A majority of them are gay men who look for beauty and sensuality. The age range is very open. I like to think, though, that I'm offering my generation – men who are 'coming of age' so to speak - images that they can relate to.

### **Recently, in paintings such as 'Chill', you began to cover your figures with bold horizontal stripes and blots of colour. Psychiatrists could talk for hours about this kind of behaviour! What prompted you to begin doing this?**

At the beginning of my career in art, I felt that I needed to demonstrate that I could paint people, so I did. But I wasn't satisfied with figures and realistic objects alone. I still paint figures, but I started covering them over with translucent colour and lines. But I'm certainly not sabotaging myself or my art, as a psychiatrist might say! Now you have to look a little longer to see what is going on...but isn't that what people are all about anyway? Shouldn't we have to look awhile longer to see what is really there?

[End of interview]

*If citing this interview, please use the following:*

Rene Capone interviewed by Paul Sendziuk, 19 April 2005, *The Art of AIDS Prevention*, <http://www.aidsart.org/#!vstc1=capone>; accessed <insert date>