

# Trevor Shimizu on Dan Graham

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Installation view of DAN GRAHAM's *Cylinder Bisected by Plane*, 1995, stainless steel and two-way mirror, dimensions variable, at the Benesse House Museum, Naoshima. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London/New York/Shanghai.

For those of you who do not know me personally this may come as a bit of a surprise—Dan Graham is a big influence. Dan, his words and his work, helped inform much of what I made in previous years. His statement, “my work is for children and parents on weekends,” however, has the most resonance for me today. Three favorites relating to this idea are his *Children's Day Care* (1998–2000), *Girl's Make Up Room* (1998–2000), and the Met Rooftop Commission in 2014, all of which are two-way mirror-glass pavilions that inspire play and social interaction.

To backtrack a little, in a video art class at the San Francisco Art Institute sometime around 1999, I was introduced to the early video works of Bruce Nauman, Paul McCarthy, and Dan Graham. For a class assignment, I was asked to record a video using a black-and-white camera made by the school's AV director. Loosely inspired by Dan's *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975)—in which he alternates between describing the perception of himself and his audience as reflected in a mirror—I placed a used cardboard toilet-paper tube in my boxer shorts and recorded a video

of myself looking at my fake erection in a bedroom mirror. This actually has little in common with Dan's video, but was more of a hybrid of what I saw in class and an early example of “performative masculinity.” I've never mentioned this video to him, but we both agree that most great art is humorous and that the humor in one's work is best appreciated by close friends—and not always by collectors.

I met Dan while I was working as a technical assistant at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) in 2006. We hit it off almost immediately after discussing our shared astrological signs. Dan told me that I happen to share the same birthday as Francisco Goya and Vincent Van Gogh. Our shared interest in astrology is rooted in an appreciation for clichés—we both keep up with the latest country music and collect refrigerator magnets. While recording Dan's voiceover for his video *Yin/Yang* (2006), I heard him relate his work to the Hudson River School, another kind of cliché that made a lasting impression on me.

The humor in Dan's work is not immediately apparent, nor is the humor in Goya's. And if I continue to only paint

landscapes, as I've been doing recently, one might say the same about me. For this reason, my birthday often brings about a personal crisis. I've noticed that on the Twitter accounts of major American museums, Goya's birthday is always overshadowed by Van Gogh's. Yet Goya had a great comedic range. Dan observed a small detail in a painting by Goya at the Met: working mostly on commission, Goya painted his business card in a bird's beak. Another work features a man bending over to look into a peephole while a woman peers at his fully exposed arse protruding through a large hole in the seat of his pants.

In 2007, the artist Antoine Catala and I were asked to revise the graffiti on Dan's *Skateboard Pavilion (model)* (1989) for his retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The act of drawing miniature examples of graffiti was both refreshing and fun. Before this job for Dan, I had pretty much given up making paintings and drawings. Working on the *Skateboard Pavilion (model)* motivated me to rent a studio and to try to paint again.

This was also around the time when Dan curated “Deep Comedy,” a group show at Marian Goodman Gallery, with Sylvia Chivaratanond. The show featured Dan's favorite New York artist, Michael Smith. I was starting out in my first studio, pretty uncertain about the medium and what to make of it. Humor wasn't something I wanted to explore, even though my favorite videos in the EAI collection were funny. I was, for the most part, embarrassed by my previous “performance” videos. I was even becoming interested in dry neo-conceptual work. “Deep Comedy” inspired me to reconsider humor. Looking back at a painting I made in 1999, *Self-Portrait with Molly Ringwald*, I thought that maybe it was a good idea to use my likeness as a character in comedic situations. I returned to the studio and painted myself as a physically fit jogger, the “third wheel” at a beach, and a lonely bachelor whose only friend is a cat. A year later, I painted *Girlfriend Wants a Baby* (2010), which eventually led to my becoming a dad. Dan Graham and “Deep Comedy” saved my art, and my life.