

BULLETT

Art & Design

Studio Visit: Hot Cheetos & Takis with EriDan

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Photography: Kathleen O'Neill

EriDan's Soho studio is like a manic dream. Primary colors and popular slogans mix with enlarged bodega receipts and 5-foot reproductions of those "Thank you, thank you, thank you" takeout bags. In the center of the storm are Eri King and Daniel Greer, a refreshingly authentic pair whose willingness to question the everyday functions and sheer absurdities of their generation inform their work—work that seeks to interrogate cultural norms; a collection of objects that are taken for granted.

The art world has gifted us with some of history's most iconic couples—Frida Khalo and Diego Rivera, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, the list goes on. But there will be no breakups on the Great Wall of China and no write-ups on Page Six for EriDan. Both King and Greer are celebrated artists in their own right—King a brilliant multidisciplinary MFA candidate whose paintings and textile work have gained her a sizable following on social media, Greer an internationally celebrated photographer and member of the Brooklyn Collage Collective—and they remain committed to true collaboration. Their latest project, *A4 Effort*, is a beautiful and deeply thoughtful exploration of enlarged "blank surfaces." Their subjects include a sheet of college-ruled paper, a broken jpeg tile, a bodega receipt and a marble notebook cover, hand-crafted using found materials. Elsewhere in the studio, hand-embroidered Hot Cheetos and linked sweatshirts showcase the couple's humor. But funny or not, the pieces are commanding—each one demands the viewer to consider the details in the world around them, a world in which the line between art and commerce has increasingly blurred.

As they get ready to bring their work to Japan, *BULLETT* sat down with the collaborative pair to talk about the pressures of succeeding as a couple and the urgency of their work.

Would you say there's a sense of humor in your work?

D: It's like, serious fun. I take a lot of value from making other people laugh, and I like the idea of being witty or sharp in a way that is important.

E: If you take things too seriously, it can take the fun out of it. I love comedy in the sense that it is always, in some form, satire. But it's still intelligent, and some people can't receive very strong opinions through didactic or preachy information. Sometimes there's a fun way to do it.

D: Also, a lot of our work is so labor intensive, and it takes so long, that we found ways to enjoy our time and make it into something that's fun.

In this age of increased individualism, where it seems like self-promotion is now the norm, how do you guys navigate your work so that you're both completely represented and able to show all sides?

D: That's been difficult in the past. I think most notably, with the embroidered Hot Cheetos. I posted it on my Instagram, but it got picked up by other accounts and reposted, only giving me credit. At that point, things happened so quickly that the damage was done. So it becomes problematic, for sure. Historically, a lot of women who are probably even better than their male counterparts, are getting significantly less credit for having ideas and executing work before men got their meaty hands onto it. We're very aware of that, being a duo. We make sure that we both put ourselves at the forefront.

E: That's the one thing I've never really encountered until we started working together. I've seen it happen, and it's funny that we talk about Claes Oldenburg and Coosje [Van Bruggen]. They would refer to her as the wife, and she has never been recognized for her achievements. The same thing with Josef and Anni Albers—even though she's represented all over New York, Josef gets the highlight. Even with textiles—I mean, women have been doing textiles forever, but suddenly when a man picks it up, it's impressive.

What's one thing that bothers you at the moment?

E: Fidget spinners. I have a theory about them—I think they're little aliens. They've become ubiquitous now, and I think they're going to get up one night and go back to their planet and tell the other aliens what they saw.

What will they say about us?

E: That we're dramatic, crazy people.

D: It's just going to be one message that reads, 'smh.'

How do you engage with the everyday? Does it inform your work?

D: We've tried to harness that idea of the everyday as a series of rituals—honing in on those rituals and deciding what they mean has been important for us. It's helped me engage even at odd times, like when I'm waiting for the subway. That's something that's tedious, but now, I'm able to stop and say, "Wow! Great! I'm here right now, in this time and this place and this is amazing." It's helped me to enjoy everything and to be more present.

E: I don't feel as crazy as I have in the past. Now, even washing my hands can be interesting. I'm forced to think what it implies when you do wash your hands—to other generations in history. Was it King James who washed his hands in relation to the blood of Christ? Sometimes when I work with the Hot Cheetos, my hands are so red that I can't get it off of me. When you're doing these things that are so banal, you realize there's this entire history implied when you just account for something like a color.

Do you feel like that's something missing in our generation? Do we forget to be present?

E: I think this is really the time to understand that we live in a collective society. We forget that because our success today relies on us being able to communicate in self-centered, non-interactive ways. Maybe I am a bit utopian, but one thing I noticed is that while all the protests were going on people were actually talking, and I think it altered the way our social communities were engaging with one another. We were opening our doors again and just looking people in the face. It wasn't about networking or trying to gain something but learning someone else's name or how they're doing. The empathy level of our generation needs to change for us to work out our differences—especially during this crazy time.

D: When it becomes easy to just create an identity out of thin air, then that becomes kind of meaningless. Especially in consumer culture, we can just buy into identity. You have people who want to look like skateboarders, but can't skate—you're never really engaging with the identity you're so fascinated with. I've realized identity is created through experiences or actions. You can't find or buy an identity—you have to build it.

How do you feel about authenticity in the art world? Do you consider your art authentic?

E: I love the quote, "I love that thing so much I'm going to copy it"—it's that idea of indication. Something can exist, but as conceptual artists, we reframe it. So, something like the reproduction of a piece of paper might not be interesting because you see it every day. But we're trying to create this larger than life spectacle.

You've created a lot of your work while still in school. Has that impacted your process?

E: I'm in grad school currently. Capitalism, consumerism, and disposal I've been working on since undergrad, but it has always been a concern, and it does inform my habits. I first started utilizing discarded objects because of my finances. I was a photo major, but I didn't have the money to continue paying for photo equipment, the darkroom or printing. I came here on a painting degree and on the way to the art store, I realized I didn't have enough money for paints either. Instead, I went to the 99-cent store and bought stickers. I got to thinking, "What if you juxtapose 50 of those?" and the neon colors stuck. I was forced to think about the way we price things in society—whose labor matters when it comes to the price tag.

D: I get really excited about trash. Deciding to work with plastic has worked for us because it's indestructible. We can construct something that lasts as long as we want. Plastic is also something that everyone, no matter their background interacts with. It's not highbrow or lowbrow—everyone needs trash bags. It's this cultural thing that just isn't spoken about.

I heard you guys met online. How did that happen?

D: We met on Tinder, after having a series of bad experiences. We just talked about art and realized that's all we really cared about.

E: His first message to me was "How is your art going?" or "Where you're going at the moment?" I was literally in the studio and figured, "Whatever, I'll respond because no one ever asked me about art." We just started talking conceptually right away. I saw his Instagram, and I was really into the work. I recognized that we had similar conceptual and visual platforms that we were going for.

D: We hit it off conceptually before emotionally.

Does this give you faith in the algorithm?

D: Yeah, I think social media is helpful in different ways. But when big corporations and businesses get their hands into it, everything gets muddled.

Is big business the only culprit? What about the people who catfish, or assume fake personas online?

D: Online, the scope is wide open to be whoever you want. Maybe that can be really truthful because it's freedom to express yourself without repercussion. But all it takes is one bad apple to spoil it. Maybe that's why we're seeing so many identity roles being questioned. Everyone's like, "Oh, I'm actually this—I'm not a man, I'm a dinosaur." And then you have to take that seriously, to some degree. But where does that end? Where is that line?

If you had to compare yourself to one celebrity couple who would it be?

E: It's like we're the Oldenburgs or the unofficial Solowitz and Eva Hesse. It started as a bad joke, maybe I shouldn't even bring it up, but we've mentioned Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

D: They're so dramatic, though.

E: They're so dramatic, but also light-hearted and funny. Our first painting was this exercise of meeting in the middle. We would take a brush from one end of the canvas, and then the other end, and we would paint a line that would meet in the middle. That helped to form the foundation of how we collaborate, and we were really able to find each other in that.

D: One thing we're focused on at this point is digging into the idea of collaboration and trying to pick apart what that actually means. I think we're coming across who we're most like, which is Fishily and Weiss. They're all about how to work better. We're sort of following the steps of how to work better, together. We made this manifesto—this rule—about exploring collaboration and working to understand what it means to be two wholes, as opposed to conforming to become this one thing. It's not 50 percent and 50 percent. We're both coming at it from one hundred percent—that's where a lot of the magic comes from.

You use a lot of elements that are tied to pop culture. Is that intentional?

D: It's interesting that companies feel like they have a hand in pop culture when something like Hot Cheetos gains a cult following. It's the people who are creating the culture. A lot of people have deep relationships with these products, relationships even they don't understand. Out of anything I've ever posted on Instagram, Cheetos and Funyuns will go through the roof—it gets so much attention that it doesn't even make sense.

Why did you start working with Hot Cheetos?

E: I started working with Hot Cheetos because of my history and relationship with them. That's what I find so fascinating—we can create our own narratives, but because of our shared experience, we find that through things like Hot Cheetos, we can relate. I don't ever want to say that I have really strong feelings against capitalism. It's just all about creating representations of the questions we all have as participants in culture.

Your work uses iconic American imagery. Do you think that will translate when you take your installation to Japan?

E: That's exactly why we want to go somewhere like Japan, which is the opposite of where we are now. I'm a Japanese citizen, but I haven't been there in a long time—so it's a bit of a trek back to my own identity. We are Americans doing and responding to what is around us, and we hope that it is translatable. But we are going to Japan to investigate what the everyday is in the rural countryside and what it is in a city like Tokyo. I'm sure these products will have different connotations outside of America, but we want to listen, and we want to hear from anyone who is willing to take the time with us.

What is your ultimate goal as artists?

D: It's not important that we sustain these views or followers—it's important to make what we want and that we make it as good we can. The rest will follow.