

Leo Gabin



Leo Gabin Interview – By Steven Cox

**Steven Cox:** Tallahassee is centered around your first feature film *A Crackup At The Race Riots*, based on the Harmony Korine novel of the same title. The film represents Florida as a place, a person, an idea and dream that embodies notions of both success and failure. Let's open up our interview by discussing Florida, for it is a state that many have traveled to meet Mickey and Minnie Mouse at Disney Land, though this dream world is far from the reality that is depicted in both *A Crackup At The Race Riots*, and Korine's *Spring Breakers* which I believe you were also all involved within. Can you discuss what intrigued you all to begin exploring Florida as a catalyst for your exploration, considering you are all based in Gent, Belgium?

**Leo Gabin:** The original book actually never indicates a specific location as setting, but at one point Harmony mentioned that the 'story' is set in Florida and this stuck with us. So we had this place in mind while reading the book for the first time. Florida is an interesting place, with this duality going on with its association of retirement communities, vacation, Disney World, sun, beaches, spring break etc. On the other hand it has this more sinister side to it, now more then ever due to being hit so hard by the economical collapse and real estate crash a few years back, adding associations of boredom, poverty, unemployment. When searching images, we found many videos of people filming the decay and abandoned houses, empty malls, bankrupt businesses, like artifacts of once prosperous times. There is this kind of poetic sadness in these recordings, fitting the tone of the book and we immediately knew we wanted to incorporate this in the film.

**SC:** You mentioned within a previous interview with Javier Peres that Harmony Korine gave you carte blanche to do whatever you wish as your contribution towards the making of *Spring Breakers*. Can you disclose what exactly you did to contribute towards the films development?

**LG:** While Harmony was in the process of writing the film we communicated a lot and provided him with spring break imagery we had collected over the years, being an American phenomenon we are very interested in. He also asked us to come out to Florida to make a side feature or whatever we wanted, to later include on the DVD. But due to several factors we weren't able to get there during the filming period. At that time we already started working on the idea to adapt his novel to film, so we put all our focus on this.

**SC:** A new series of painterly works are being presented within Tallahassee that relate directly to *A Crackup At The Race Riots*. Such images are perhaps screenshots from the film that further epitomize notions of death, dirt, poverty, religion and celebrity orientated obsessions that highlight the reality of one's American dream. To what extent do these realities play on you all individually on a moral level, for despite the images being interesting, they wildly portray a failing economy and many individual's desperation for online attention, or even recognition.

**LG:** We deliberately chose not to use images directly derived from the film, because we didn't want them to be like the 'Crackup' paintings. But all images used in the paintings are taken from amateurish shot footage in Florida, mostly encountered during our search for imagery for the film. Like always, images find their way onto the canvas because they relate to what we are interested in and currently seeing at the moment online. So there is definitely a clear relation between the two, but the film stands on its own. That's also why we chose to not title the exhibition like the film, but to have an overarching title for both. Our interest has always been in how young people use new media to express themselves and capture their surroundings, which is also present in the film. By using transcripts out of the book there is this fictional aspect to the whole, which is new for our approach to video. We like the fact that the film leaves an uncomfortable feeling, but the use of shocking footage is limited, however there is an abundance available online. It was more interesting to balance on the border of harmless naive and disturbing imagery and using sound to help capture the general mood the book evokes, in our interpretation that is.

**SC:** *I am interested to know more about how you work collectively within the studio environment, for I am aware that there is a free for all approach to how the painting works are formed. Once they are started, there is no stopping till they are complete, and no work is ever re-visited? Is there a balance between each of you in regards to how much one contributes to each painting?*

**LG:** We consider the way we work more as a trio, rather than a collective. The ideas, mood, energy, is created due to a combination of us three specifically. We never think of it as in, how much is individually contributed, as this will vary in each work. A finished Leo Gabin piece always contains 1/3 of each of us, regardless of the physical labor put into it by each individual. This question is always hard to explain and maybe difficult to understand for some, but we don't consider it to be an issue. A piece is finished when there's this feeling between ourselves where we just know. Sometimes this is instantly, other times we have to let a piece rest for a while. We do occasionally decide to work further on a piece we initially thought was finished or even put on a new primer and start again. The traces the work contains because of the first layer add to the final piece.

**SC:** *Can you tell me a bit about each of your strengths? Are any of you more so interested in painting and printing rather than the editing of footage? Or would you say that you all own equal interests within all aspects of your processes?*

**LG:** The interest in different media is very equal, but of course there's always some technical stuff and preparation that's done individually. But this division of labor has evolved naturally over the years without any pre-arrangements. This let's things just run smoother, where others might work with assistants. However, as previously mentioned the creative side is always the result of a combination of us three and who did what specifically we consider to be irrelevant. From the beginning we knew that what we do is not about the individual.

**SC:** *The appropriated videos found online, are readily available by those who perhaps 'follow' the maker, though I am intrigued about this idea of the videos being 'found' for perhaps many of these videos have been online for months prior to your discovery. Do you consider your material as belonging to you once you have all manipulated the footage? And through what lens is authorship viewed?*

**LG:** We do manipulate and edit our footage making it our own, but we could even take it at is, it's all about the context you place it in. That's the beauty of appropriation art, using elements normally not considered art or having a non-art function to create a new work. The fact these amateurish recordings and often very private self-shot images are readily available online does indeed raise questions about authorship, but this specific question has always been part of the essence of our practice.

**SC:** *Do you consider sites like YouTube and WorldStarHipHop as endless sources of valuable material and footage? Do you consider these sites exhaustible?*

**LG:** We can't predict, but we think they will be valuable sources for a long time, but maybe our interest will also shift to other media or resources. For us it's about the content and authors, whatever medium provides the most interesting material we will explore.

All images courtesy of Leo Gabin and Peres Projects.

