



# Artists Speak: Oliver Herring

**Born**  
1964, Heidelberg, Germany

**Education**  
BFA, University of Oxford (Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art), Oxford, England  
MFA, Hunter College, NY, NY

**Lives and Works**  
Brooklyn, NY

**Media & Materials**  
Performance, photography, sculpture, video

**Biography**  
Many of Oliver Herring's stop-motion videos and participatory performances feature 'off-the-street' strangers. Embracing chance encounters, his works liberate participants to explore aspects of their personalities through art in a way that would otherwise probably be impossible. In a series of large-scale photographs, Herring documents strangers' faces after hours of spitting colorful food dye, recording a moment of exhaustion and intensity. Herring's use of photography takes an extreme turn in his most recent series of photo-sculptures. For these works, Herring painstakingly photographs a model from all possible angles, then cuts and pastes the photographs onto the sculptural form of his subject.

"I just popped the question, 'Do you want to do some art-related project?' He wanted to know more, and I said, 'Why don't you come tomorrow, whenever...let's do something simple, just spit some food-dye....' And that perked his interest and he was gung-ho.

"If somebody actually just walks up to you and says, 'Hey, do you want to do something out of the ordinary?' there might be a little reluctance at first. But deep down, you want to do it. It's adventure. That's what brings people in front of the camera.

"Once I gained the confidence to just play with the unexpected, and the more chance I could incorporate into the work, the more my work grew because I couldn't predict what would happen. And that chance element, combined with working with strangers, became the heart of my work."



*Chris after Hours of Spitting Food Dye Outdoors, 2004.* C-print, 41 1/2 x 62 1/2" (105.5 x 159 cm). Edition of five with 2 AP. Originally commissioned by Artpace, San Antonio, Texas. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York.



*Pure Sublimation, production still, 2000-01.* Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York.

"The hardest thing is to work on a level of trust, especially with strangers. There is a level of expectation that can be very hard to meet. The premise is to make a video but that can mean a lot of different things. Perhaps it sounds much more glamorous to some people than it is—especially the videos that I make, which are stop-motion. I repeat a lot of movement, and whatever we end up doing, because I don't know where it is going. I try to take my cues from the personalities of these people. So if I have two people whom I know in the studio, I can circumvent that whole issue and go straight to having fun. Ultimately, that's where you want to go—to that place where you enjoy it, where you're not self-conscious, where personalities come through.



"In these photographic pieces, I'm working with a person for two or three months, and that leaves a huge margin for things to happen and change. The person changes—things happen—and change gets incorporated into the piece. I take thousands of photographs. It feels very deconstructive. Then I try to bring it back together again, and that's the restructuring process. Still, even these finished pieces are unsettling because you really don't know what you're looking at. Is it a portrait? Is it a summary of the time we spent together? Is it two-dimensional? Is it three-dimensional? It's disturbing. Maybe it's the times we live in. Things are very difficult to gauge.... Maybe the perfect object, the perfect shining object, seems way too utopian. Maybe something that's fractured, deconstructed, and reconstructed just seems more truthful."

*Gloria, 2004.* Digital C-Print photographs, museum board, foam core and polystyrene, with vitrine. 72 x 40 x 40" (183 x 102 x 102 cm). Private collection. Photo: Chris Burke Studio. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York.



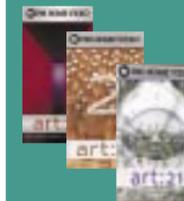
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