



Dani Marti

Story Owen Craven
Photography Karen Hughes

Dani Marti works with both video and woven construction to create contemporary portraits. The portraits capture not only an individual, but their inner psyche as well as their relationship and interaction with Marti in a moment of time.

Your work is predominately portraiture, albeit a less conventional form of portraiture. You create video portraits as well as abstract portraits through weaving and constructing of materials such as ropes, leather, beads and the like. Tell me how you got to this point in your art making.

I tend to work at a very intuitive level. I started using ropes in 1998 and I was just playing with them — creating something. But subconsciously I kept on referring to people. Each time I started weaving, I would get inspiration from people — people I knew, historical figures or constructed personalities. So it started at a very unconscious level.

The same thing happened in Glasgow, when I moved over in 2004. I put my weaving practices aside and picked up the video camera for the first time. For the first year I was just shooting, shooting, shooting without knowing what I was trying to do. There were so many different stories. It took over a year for me to realize what I was doing, which was trying to capture people again. I then realized what was really driving me in both practices: this obsession of trying to get close to someone.

What comes first the video or the weaving — do you use your videos as sketches, similar to that of someone sitting for a more conventional portrait, and depart from there?

It depends. I think they're two independent things that interact with each other. Sometimes I will video someone. I can video someone for one afternoon or for ten minutes, or I can video someone for a whole year. I've done each of those projects. Sometimes after having all that footage and editing, it's like weaving. Constructing something — a portrait. Many times after having those videos I am inspired to approach a completely

abstract surface to refer to those people. More and more, the woven works refer to someone I've taped.

Your portraits are very personal. They must reflect a lot of you in them, simply from the physical nature of weaving and the emotional engagement of the videos.

Weaving is very strenuous and demanding. It's like bondage. The weavings can be like torture, you have to sit there and repeat the same patterns, mantra, codes, DNA for days and days and days. I keep on thinking about the person I am thinking about.

You become very obsessed?

I'm a very obsessive person. I become very obsessed about the person and thinking about the person all the time. It's like the grandmother knitting a jumper and thinking about the child she's knitting for. It's emotional. So in the end, all the portraits are also about me to some degree.

How do you choose what materials go with which person? And how do you decide if the portrait should be a video or a woven piece?

I've got a bank of materials; lots of ropes etc that just sit there. Materials are things that mix in and just flow. I borrow titles from films that refer to the people to some degree, or sometimes I just use their names. I'm interested in people who are open to me in front of the camera. It's often the person that might inspire me to make a bigger work further down the track.

Sometime ropes can sit in my studio for years until something happens that triggers me to use them. Sometimes I can make a video and respond to it with a woven work straight away. Other times a video can be done and maybe I'll do a woven work or maybe not. What's important for me in the videos is the concept of intimacy. I'm very interested in portraying the person in a very intimate way.

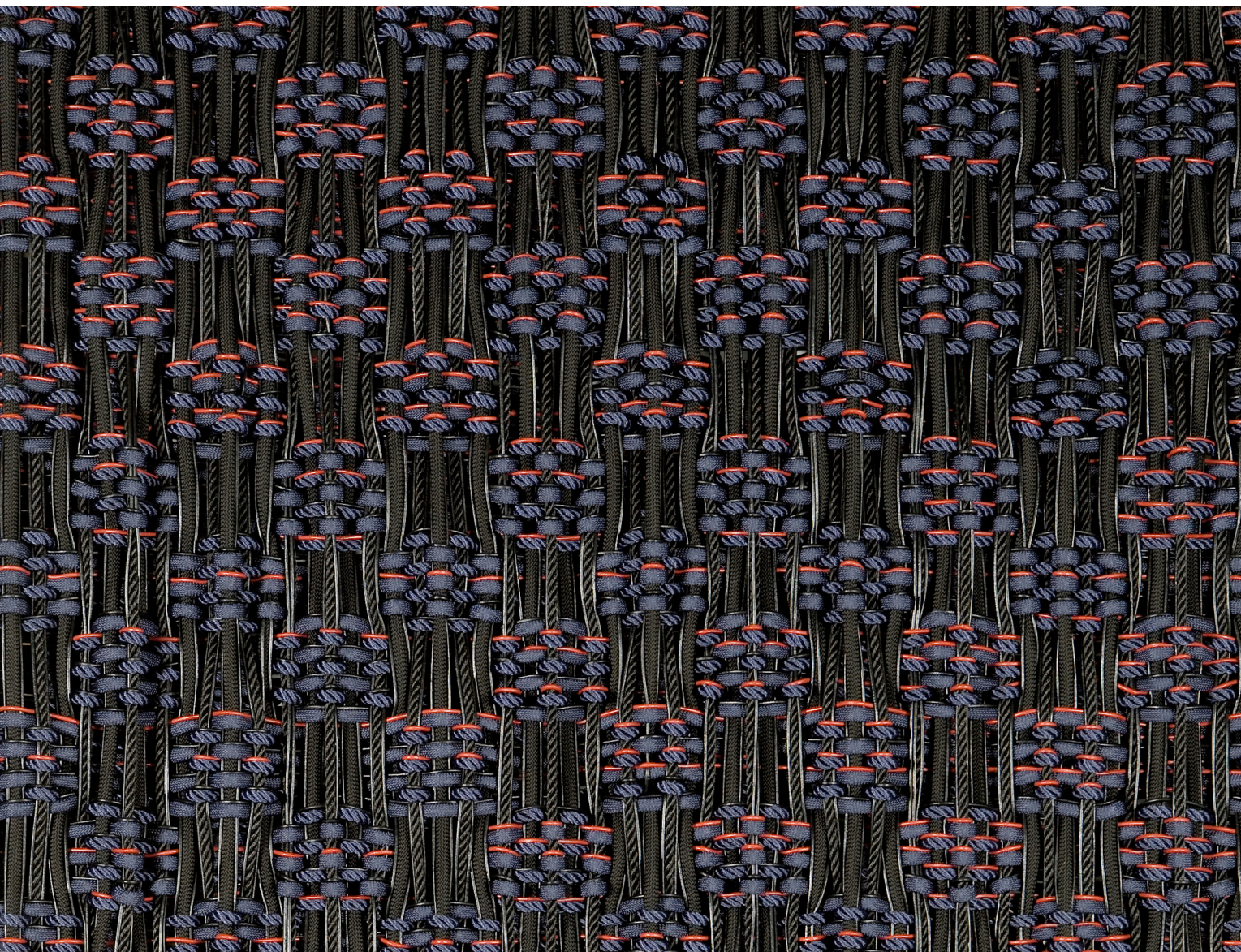
I'm also interested in the ethical issues behind the videoing. There are many ethical issues as they're not just portraits about people but portraits about relationships. I build up a relationship with someone and they enjoy unconditional attention from the camera and me. For me it's about



01 **All you need is love**, 2008, hdy 16:9, 17'31"
 02 **Braveheart, take 4** (detail), 2008, polyester, polypropylene, nylon and leather on wood, 143 x 200 x 13cm
 03 **David**, 2007, 1 channel, ratio 4:3, 8'29", commissioned by Glasgow International 2008, sound arrangement by Diana Simpson
 04 **One breath below consciousness** (detail), 2008, white polyester, white nylon and soil, 240 x 200 x 10cm
 Images courtesy of BREENSPACE and the artist.



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validating them and their story. I feel a bit cruel just walking away when the project is over. But I cannot keep in touch with everybody.

Your works combine genuine intimacy and candidness. Take for example David — the homeless boy who was your subject in One Breath Below Consciousness. How do you get your subjects to allow you into their space and world?

I'm constantly videoing people. I'm obsessed by it. I'm like a hunter wanting to capture them all the time. In the case of David, that was the first thing I filmed in Glasgow. I picked up my camera; I was on the street walking through a mall and saw this guy begging. I sat next to him and asked how he was doing. Asked if I could video him. I gave him some money and my hat — it was very cold. He said it was fine and asked what I wanted him to do. I told him to ignore me and pretend I was not there. I hung around with him for a whole hour, filming him. I had very strong reactions from the public. People were saying to me, 'what the fuck are you doing; you're taking advantage of him. You should be ashamed of yourself'. I said, 'look, I'm an artist and I'm capturing reality', which they thought was bullshit. It was interesting all those reactions all because of the camera.

Do you ever work those reactions in the portraits?

I'm not interested, no, because then I'm giving too many answers to the public and telling them how to feel about it. It's up to the public to fulfill the portrait and to fulfill its meaning.

You're intentions then are to produce very abstract portraits of someone — and that doesn't have to be a specific person but a representation of anybody.

Yeah, it could be any person. I don't go in there with a script. About 80 percent of the people I meet are through the Internet — through

Gaydar. I introduce myself, 'Hi, I'm an artist, I do portraits, let's have sex, and after having sex I want to do a portrait of you'. A lot of people say yes; many people say come over and we'll have sex and talk about it later. So I'm using sexuality as a way to get close to people. I'm often going into a situation not knowing what's going to happen. I leave it very open. Sometimes it can be very visual, or sometimes very documentary based.

In terms of abstraction, it's a very abstract approach. I'm just sitting there.

Would you say sex is a big part of all your works? What about gayness?

Sexuality is a big part of my work, yeh. I am using my sexuality as a tool. I use it to get close to someone. But my work is not about gayness, or gay sexuality. It is about people. When I'm portraying gay people in my videos, I'm interested in them as human beings — universal emotions.

In Anthony Gardner's essay, Gestural Unconsciousness, he describes the key to contemporary portraits as "a personality being revealed through ticks, gestures and uncontrollable responses". Is this what you see yourself doing?

Not really, no. I'm interested in the camera. It's about a camera hovering there and picking up something. Sometimes the camera can pick up more than the human eye — it can capture more. And the goal of my video work is about exploring the impossibility of portraiture. Trying to get close to someone. But it's one thing to get close to someone and another thing to capture them. That's what drives me. But even from the beginning of the process I think about how I am probably going to fail.

So it's about your tools and about failure? About not being able to know somebody through the tools? Is that why you extend the works into another medium?

Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes a woven work — I call them paintings now — can allow me to say much more about the person than a video. I did a show in Glasgow that was opened with a critic from the blind society present. The nature of my work allowed him to experience the portraits. Braveheart was a part of that show — the critic touched the work and could feel the leather and ropes, indicating the sexual nature of the painting. Another portrait of my mother was hanging and it was soft and smooth. He could read more than us, probably, through the tactility.

My work is portraiture to another degree. Behind the rope, or leather, or necklaces there is a person. There is a story. I am trying to collect all these stories. It's about the process of collecting.

The whole process is very organic. Waking up everyday as Dani Marti would be a potential project. Any encounter could be your inspiration?

Totally, it's very much about encounters and seeing what happens. It's about intimacy, contact. And looking back, I can see a pattern of all those things developing in my work.

Dani Marti is currently working with Newcastle Region Art Gallery on a travelling exhibition that explores his unorthodox approach to portraiture. He is represented by BREENSPACE, Sydney, and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

www.danimarti.com
www.breenspace.com
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