



“Beauty is our weapon against nature; by it we make objects, giving them limit, symmetry, proportion. Beauty halts and freezes the melting flux of nature.”

Camille Paglia

el fleco

by

yasser musa

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Introduction

There are times in your life when someone turns up the lights and you are streamed into a new portal, a space you heard about, but once transported there, the evanescence of that space becomes a source of insight, delight and obsession.

In June 2009 as I prepared for my 20th anniversary of being an artist, Kate Usher, a 24 year old artist set up a Facebook account for me. Since then I've had hesitant contact with the FB because it is too complex for my 20th century bullshit.

From February 10th to 25th, 2011 I conducted a series of interviews physical and electronic with Kate to coincide with her March 4th collaborative exhibit with Jill Burgess titled **El Fleco + Vixens, Bitches, and Whores: Seriously Misunderstood Women**. Kate's section of the show is El Fleco which is a Facebook album containing images I can only describe using a Leonard Cohen lyric, "dance me to your beauty with a burning violin, dance me through the panic until I'm gathered safely in."

When you talk to Kate about art you feel self doubt. It is real. When you talk to her about ideas you get deep insights and remarkable intellectual nimbleness. It is tempting to those who belong to the physical and material camp of art production to reduce for quick sale Kate's artistic integrity.

This book is about the artist Kate Usher - El Fleco.

3028_105048276744_641861744_2953758_6885570_n



El Fleco: Still unemployed.

These are “the faces of emotion.” Now 2008, I was falling in love with Bryan. He worked near the family court in Belize City at a cell phone store. It was around Valentines Day.

1st interview with El Fleco (Image Factory)

10 February, 2011

(YM = Yasser Musa/El Fleco = Kate Usher)

YM: El Fleco? What is it?

El Fleco: The bangs, hair and “mechon”, you know, those emos. Check out picture n641861744_2287546_9170.jpg
It started as an album

YM: On Facebook?

El Fleco: Yes.

Michael Gordon interrupts the interview selling a painting of a man with green face. “I could wait until you come outside”

El Fleco: The picture w.bmp is when I was unemployed and with free time. So I just put on make up.

*(she uses her apple mac book webcam to shoot the portraits.
Apple has a thing called photo booth)*

Emo is a style of rock music typically characterized by melodic musicianship and expressive, often confessional lyrics. It originated in the mid-1980s hardcore punk movement of Washington, D.C., where it was known as “emotional hardcore” or “emocore”. (wikipedia)



n641861744_2287546_9170.jpg

The El Fleco series is fluid, transient, the inescapable now. Kate, the artist, knew I had given up on the cell phone, but she still embraced my interest in certain technologies. I knew something was going on with this new community, this new spirit of posting your every move – every breath you take.

El Fleco: I had extensions

YM: Why Facebook?

El Fleco: I've always had a fascination with my hair. I'll bring you some childhood pictures when I had in my Don King look. In 2008 I started making a video about black hair. My first encounter as a black person was in Merida, Yucatan in August 2005.

YM: You went to Merida to study right?

El Fleco: Yes. Art. My mom took me there, stayed for three days. I cried at the Italian Coffee Co. Her expectation was that 5 years from then I'd be an artist, the artist I said I wanted to be.



YM: The photo -

6140_145884611744_641861744_3602989_7184836_n[1].jpg,
that was in Merida? You look like a boy.

El Fleco: My aunt was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer, so I went with her to Los Angeles . I was 20.

YM: So in LA, that is where you got the white shades?

El Fleco: I am obsessed with Kanye. So I went to Hollywood with a family friend Romy. She took me to one of these knick knack shops and I found it. In a white box labeled Kanye West White. The man in the store said it was the last one. Kanye had the hit song, “Stronger” which samples Daft Punk’s “harder, faster, better...”

YM: And art school?

El Fleco: I gave up. I decided to come back to Belize City to start my life over and to fulfill my mother’s dream to study law. Bryan is two years younger than me.



YM: I remember that he broke up with you on facebook. What was the exact post?

El Fleco: I Noh Wah Deal With dis Noh Moh. It was August 11, 2009.

YM: And what did you do?

El Fleco: I blasted his wall.

YM: Here is a Channel 7 question: How did that make you feel?

El Fleco: I was forced to get over it. I didn't like how he latched on to my family, to Alfonso and now I go to the club and he is trying to latch on to Gilvano.

YM: What a guy!

El Fleco: I feel like...my time has been spoiled. He is taking over my family.



El Fleco:

You say Fat, I say thick. You say mad, I say swag!

YM: That is brilliant. Is that the title of the photo?

A stupid question. Sorry. I come from this tradition on art where I think of things as a process that leads to a product. Like the exhibition. I always thought that this is what artists end up doing, make exhibitions, participate in them. But this facebook world is revealing an intimacy that is hard to quantify. Its immediacy is so powerful. Its gravitas in the idea that content is a streaming illusion. Fuck, my world turned upside down. The product is zero. The process is infinite. Lets get back to the photos.

“What wont kill me! Will make me stronger.” - Kanye West

YM: Tell me about the break up #2:

El Fleco: So we broke up August 11, 2009 and by August 20th we were back. But by December 2009 the 2nd break up came. So I posted photo 121. I say swag!

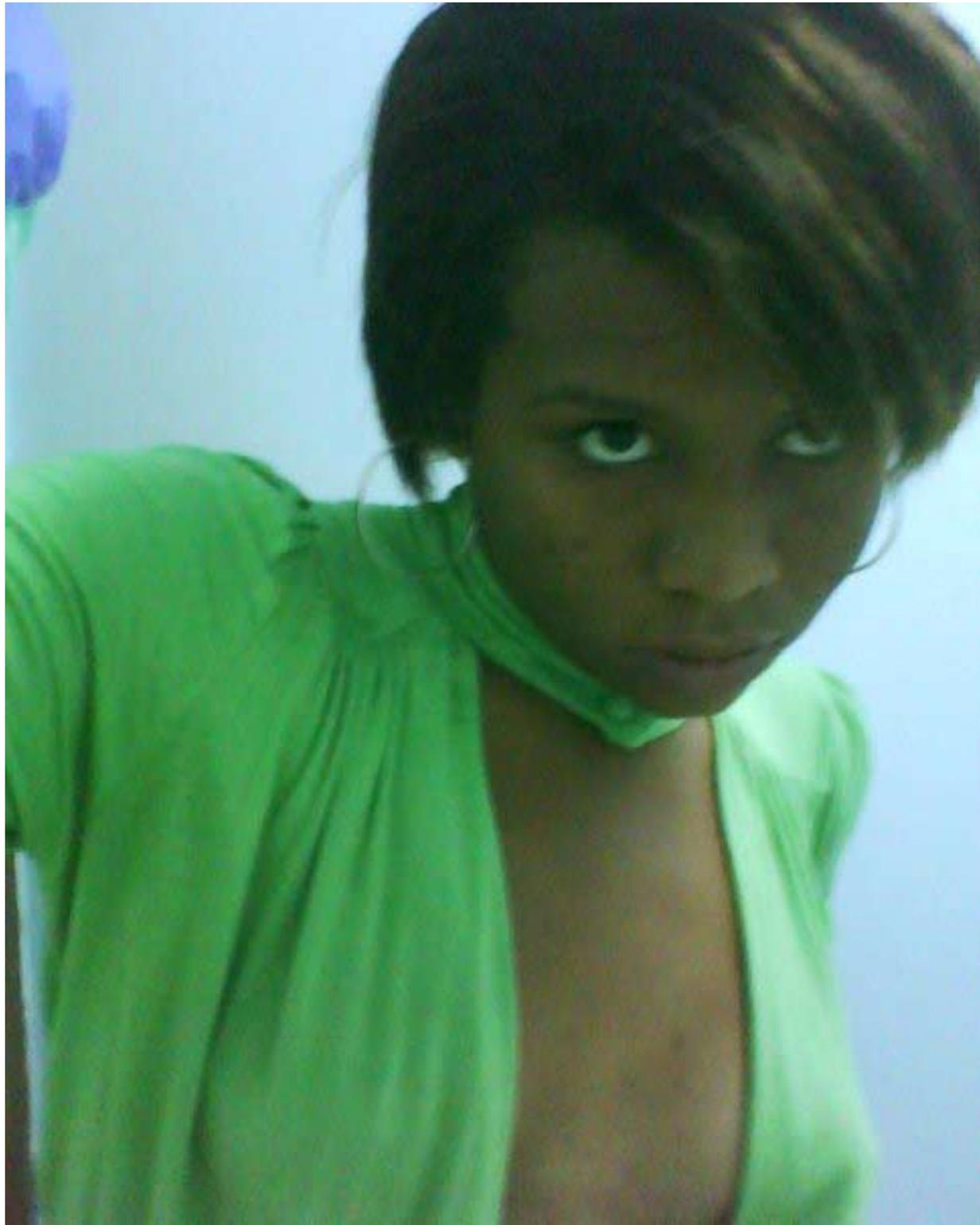


2/12/11

2nd interview with El Fleco (this one electronic)

YM: Tell me about the green dress

El Fleco: The green dress is actually a green shirt that I bought at the Swap meet in Inglewood in 2008. I was taken there by two, what I can only call ghetto fabulous creatures from South Central Los Angeles. It was quite an experience, the 'leader' of the tour showed me a prison love letter she got from her boyfriend as we waited for the bus. Until that day, I was sure that these things only happened in movies. This photo was taken in December of 2008, I was feeling the pressure of having loads of spare time (un-employed phase) and wanted to look 'fierce' that passé word that Tyra Banks used to describe her America's Next Top Model candidates, one of the things I like to watch on TV.



YM: You said on the 2nd break up things were different. How?

El Fleco: Yes well the second break up was 'final'. He was cold and disappeared, phone wise and text, things that he had abused profusely in the course of the relationship. A day could easily have had ten texts and 3 phone calls. Could you imagine that level of insanity??? What could we possibly would have needed to discuss? The daily mundane nonsenses of our days?? I was working supposedly in Culture at ICA (Institute of Creative Arts) and him scanning photos and droppin off phones to be fixed and unlocked. So when he 'disappeared' and then things tightened at the Bliss. Ha! They could change that name from Bliss to distress. It compounded into a series of very public and unwanted panic attacks at work. Everyone just assumed that it was his fault as it was customary for him to come be a nuisance to me at work, and to start petty arguments during lunch, then drive, better said, skid off back to work. They just all thought I was falling apart because: he did not want me anymore. They had said that I should have figured as much and just move on with my life. Good advice from some clearly misguided and hopeless asinine creatures. It could not have been that I was stressed with my own issues and upset with the frustrations set up by the ICA/NICH oppressive-institution? I really felt that I fell to pieces and he left just at the time when everything was falling apart - work-wise and personally. I don't feel that badly about it now, but at the time, in the thick of it all, I was destroyed.



14 Feb 2011

YM: I wanted to discuss sixty minutes and the Grammys. You saw Lady Gaga with Anderson Cooper taking about fame? I couldn't determine who was the journalist with that exchange. Then minutes later Gaga came on stage at the Grammy's in an egg. Be what you want to be. Born this way. What you think?

El Fleco: I was unable to see this year's Grammy's and the 60 Minutes that preceeded it, as we were still coming back down from Placencia. I did manage to see the entire interview on CBS News.com and the images on Stylebistro.com. I think that even though Anderson Cooper was the correspondent, Gaga controlled that interview. She had the outfits, her responses were inquisitive and/or provoked a rise that consequently kept Mr. Cooper distracted the entire time. The outfits alone held his attention to an extent that I believe he was unable to 'truly' probe her as he intended.

I like that she chose an egg over a shell to perform "born this way". Gaga stated clearly and adamantly that she is 'no saint and neither will she pretend to be' "I don't lie. I smoke weed to write music." She can come out of an egg. I like the extra skin, that she put on as well, it reminds me of the performance artist Orlan, the one who does the 'plastic surgery performances.'"



El Fleco: When I put things up on Facebook, I mostly think of myself. I am shocked sometimes, when people respond, by 'liking' or 'commenting' because then I realize that this is 'out there in the open' I honestly feel sometimes that my Facebook is just a giant diary, so when people respond, I feel sometimes that they have picked the lock and have gained access to my stuff. Then is when I remember, Christ! my friends are reading this. What do they think of me now? Are we still friends? Then I also contemplate family, and the possible 'embarrassment' or shock they must feel at seeing my posts.

 Trish Perez and Sofia Serrano like this.



Sofia Serrano If only i had the BOLAS to do that.....my mother would have a cow!

July 22, 2009 at 12:23pm · Like



Katie Usher hehe Wednesday, July 22, 2009 at 12:23pm

July 22, 2009 at 12:23pm · Like



Erienne Anya Naomi that looks so cool...literally...esp in this hot weather that hairstyle would be ideal. :D hey what happened to our lunch meet?'

July 22, 2009 at 5:02pm · Like



Kadeem Andrew Bennett u bald ass hell

July 22, 2009 at 10:02pm · Like



Katie Usher @ Kadeem hhahahahaha. I know meins. @ Erienne, what you doing today? or when u have time. Yes I saw Kanye girl had a similar look at the BET award, only cuase hers was platinum blonde, dark cops' shades and red lipstick.

July 23, 2009 at 9:24am · Like



Erienne Anya Naomi hi katie what bout tomorrow? u busy for lunch?

July 24, 2009 at 10:25am · Like



Katie Usher sure! where and when?

July 24, 2009 at 10:26am · Like



Erienne Anya Naomi mmm dunno you pick the place

July 24, 2009 at 10:35am · Like



Katie Usher grrrrr! I hate picking. hehhehe lol! You want a celebrity burger

July 24, 2009 at 10:44am · Like



Erienne Anya Naomi ok then celebrity it is 12 or 1 or....?

July 24, 2009 at 11:55am · Like



Katie Usher 12 is fine Er! I will see you there

July 24, 2009 at 11:56am · Like



Katie Usher I di feel like go buzz cut again. :P

January 13, 2010 at 10:47am · Like

YM (2/12/11) : What is it about Kanye that attracts you? Name some other music people.

El Fleco: Kanye West is the first 'real' rapper that I have heard mainstream since 2Pac Shakur. Which is another artist that I truly admire. But unlike 2Pac, Kanye has none of the stereotypical gangsta rap 'finish' nor does he apologize for it. He actually seems quite preppy and artsy. He sometimes strikes me as a white boy trapped in a black man's body, this is sometimes how I view myself. Did you know that Kanye dropped out of Art School too, in his third year. First heard him in 2004, I was in 6th form, the song was 'Through the Wire' he spoke of his near death experience, a car crash, and that catapulted his career. He was producing before and had always wanted to rap, but when that happened he realized that he NEEDED to rap.



He followed his dream. He inspires me. He is cocky, which I don't like, but I admire that he tries to use that both as a defense mechanism and to humor life. I find him to be a very savvy artist unlike most musicians, rappers especially, which are usually hoodlums and thugs that are talented but that become victims to their own environments, backgrounds and success. Other artists I like are:

Common

Kid Cudi

Patsy Cline

Wisin Y Yandel

Shakira

Pepe Aguilar

Belanova

La Roux

Percy Sledge

Marvin Gaye

Al Green

Jay Z

Nina Simone

John Legend

Lupe Fiasco

and Pink



Interview:

Feb 16, 2010

YM: The start of the El Fleco interview today interrupted by Michael Gordon discussing a person who smokes too much marijuana. He says it is a “chemical compulsory” that they have a “psyc u atic.” We are in the Image Factory office with thousands of books and access to youTUBE. Erron finds the Kanye video Stronger. El Fleco is beaming today. She sings. Her elbows sway. Her neck tilts slightly as Takashi Murakami’s intensity lights up the screen.

I try to direct the interview.

YM: Ok, let us go back to Merida. Tell me about your home, your classmates.

El Fleco: You see that picture. Taken in drawing class. My 3 ½ years in Merida was spin class, and art exhibits. I lived in Francisco de Montejo, a fraccionamiento. Most of my fellow students were homosexual, bi sexual, bi curious or transsexual. My heterosexuality was minority.

YM: Tell me about the gold dress.

El Fleco: Weeks after the 2nd break up. His cousin took that picture at Palm Island. Actually it was her dress.

YM: And the Karaoke picture?

El Fleco: That was taken by my dad February 2010. He invited me to karaoke. He came back to Belize after 5 years of being in Chicago. His life is one long karaoke. To me he is a fantasy.



YM: What is privacy to you?

El Fleco:

An illusion. I have this strange thing that what should be deemed private should be public and vice versa.



Thu, February 17, 2011

the real el fleco

From: Katie Usher <katieusher09@gmail.com>

It is 11:18:17 pm

and for some strange reason I am still awake and still not hungry. I guess those three stouts really set in.

They are fools

they have no intention with me in absolute,

if just to have 1 good-time encounter

and then discard me forever.

even and especially the memory of me

my voice,

my laughter

my hair

my smell

my mind

my body

Wasting time, all my precious time

I can't keep a steady job

I guess the problem is me

I can't maintain relationships of any kind

family

friend

especially not amorous ones



that is el fleco

she is what I heard on BET referred to as a "HOT MESS!"

she is a college drop-out

an artist, scratch, a dormant artist.

some what dyslexic

I spell and read words wrong all the time. My students realized it right away

and they began to make fun of me and not take me seriously.

So my failed teaching career is my own fault I guess.

This is the real El Fleco, unravelling quickly and bursting at the seams.

Does anyone see???

then again, people really love train wrecks, so they will sit back, relax and watch the 'hot mess' turn into cold disaster

El Fleco is scared.

im on the verge

of 25

frustration

running against time

tradition

conventions

i don't perm my hair

i drink

i smoke

I won't make it here

women are not, not, should never be this way.



That is what el Fleco is
El Fleco, was an attempt to show people
Beto and the ex especially
that I am beautiful
or I can be if the right light and angle is placed on me.

The last thing that Bryan Gill told me: via text was "well God knows I tried, but you are impossible to deal with. Doubt any man will be able to. Hope you don't end up old and lonely"
That is what he said, and as much as I don't want to trust, confide or believe in curses or hexes, that is all I have to explain all of this.

He has never seen the Fleco, nor will he care to, and even if he does, he won't see what I want him to.
Alberto Vasquez Martinez or Bets as I call him, doesn't even bother with that album.



The Purple Dress @ the factory

YM: To the voyeur the El Fleco album could be quantified as sexual personae. It inspires the mind to seek previous knowledge. However, it takes a kind of intellectual analysis to capture the essential communication with the El Fleco album. It is private public. Simplicity complexity. It provokes what Adbusters calls Clicktivism, this urge to progress into the portal of the other. Same thing occurs when watching television. The remote is a distant click, not as intimate as the mouse, but one second we are watching William and Marleni on Open Your Eyes discussing the government's Restore Belize agenda, and the next with Clicktivism we are teleported to a couple in the middle of an intimate Cialis bathtub.

I am searching for the art in the El Fleco album. As if this construct would validate both the text and the images. The adventure of the personalized becomes intoxicating. What next? Metrics? Pixels re-formed into light as an activist statement?



Notice that everything wrong in my life is because of young misguided men. I know and realize this and still make all the exact same mistakes.



YM: When I think of Facebook and such things I feel a vast disconnect. Yet I witness a generation of youth “totally” engaged. Constantly connected. How does this engagement work?

El Fleco: That is just the thing. We are vastly dis-connected, dis-contented, dissed and mis-represented. That is it. We have parents who grew up in a different world, a world free of cell phones, tweets and clouds.

They really really just don't understand. We engage of course in this social network, because it is a complete false (false). I have few real friends, and the few that I have I doubt and depend on and criticize and spoil (dote on) all at once. That is tough and unmanageable, like my hair before I process it. But Facebook (I have 500 friends, between my two accounts) and I choose when to interact with them. These are truly filtered and processed relationships. These I can handle, these I can comb, like my permed hair. We connect to connect on a level that we can: virtually and superficially, falsely. This is a way to stay connected without really connecting at all. Do you know I see Facebook contacts on the street, and none of us will ever say hi to each other. Imagine that, and this can happen after we have a foolish (yet deep, supposedly) 20 minute convo. on Facebook chat.



YM: What does your generation represent?

El Fleco: My generation represents technology. It is all about cell phones, Flips, laptops, notebooks, mp3s (when's the last time I bought a cd?) [2003 in June I think it was on my way to San Fransisco, I wanted to listen to Mana on the plane ride to calm my nerves, I hate flying]. Make it smaller, everything, send a text instead of making a call. lol-ing instead of literally laughing out loud. It is all about being tech savvy. No child should not know to write an essay (scratch- a small paragraph) in Microsoft Word. No teen should not know how to upload their 'jerk' videos on Youtube. No sensible 24 year old should not know how to Facebook, Tweet, Blog, text, and answer the phone all at once without missing a beat. It just doesn't work that way.



YM: What is your state of mind right now?

El Fleco: I am totally fucked right up. Please excuse the french, but that is the only way that I can describe my current state of mind. I still can't grapple with the fact that I can not keep a regular job.

That I can not find a decent guy. All my friends seem to be able to, I'm not jealous, I just feel left out. And what burns me to the core, is that these losers that I hook up with can be decent, I've seen them in action with the new girl. I guess that they just can't be decent with me, my fault I'm sure. I got all dressed up last night for Megabingo (pura farandula, i know) and was having a beautiful dinner with Gils and family in Chinatown, when I rushed out to be there in time, just to be told, "NO! we don't need you anymore. We will only do it in English from now on. We got bad reviews". Do you know how that burns, when something you don't even truly want rejects you. This took me right back to the African Queen. I just don't know how much "No, we don't need you" I can take. I feel broken down.



YM: How do you approach your growth as an artist?

El Fleco: I am scared. honestly. What should I say? What should I wear, what about my hair???

What to do? Should I paint? I know that that is what they will come looking for. These are the questions that are buzzing. Notice how lost I am. I still have not mentioned the word art yet. But with all this, I am very excited. My painting teacher, has planted the idea in my brain of exhibits in Chile and Playa del Carmen. Is this it? Will I finally be that artist that I had planned on being in August 2005? Is it now? I try not to be scared, a slave to fear, both "the Alchemist" and "the Mastery of Love" warn against that emotion and mention that that fear is the only thing that holds us back from 'our legend' and 'our best selves'.



post-script

“Imagine that the problem is not physical... Imagine that it goes deeper, right to the core of what we call our civilization and that no one outside of ourselves can effect real change, that our civilization, our government are sick and that we are mentally ill and spiritually dead – that all our issues and crises are symptoms of this deeper sickness.”

– Charles Bowden, Blood Orchid

El Fleco is a signpost spot in art for Belize. Here we have an artist whose life is her work. At 24, she's already been secretary, art student, teacher and girlfriend. She dropped out of art school. She resigned a few times. At the core, El Fleco is an artist. She says dormant, I say conceptual. She is honest.

I asked Kate if I could write and design a book about her 24 year old life not because I am fascinated by the idea to “turn up the lights”, but because I want the rest of our population especially those with social power to recognize that our educational and cultural foundations are based in theatrical fakery. We have too many institutions void, bankrupt and lacking in diligence. Our sense of urgency is becoming extinct.

Let us learn how to listen to the new media generation.

El Fleco, the album is a vehicle for personal commentary. Now, El Fleco the artist has decided to convert her status as a private virtual heroine into a presentation of what Lady Gaga calls Born This Way. And like RUN DMC who said Walk This Way, El Fleco is telling us with brutal honesty that art comes streaming these days. It comes as messages, requests, chats, uploads...

The era of El Fleco has been posted. Send it to your friends.