



Black, Chris. "Artist Marc Hundley Recommends Finding Success after 40." *GQ*, 5 Oct. 2023, [www.gq.com/story/marc-hundley-interview?fbclid=PAAaYyCMR1LN9mm30bdfON4JXbMTy-qbem\\_SxSanpxHcy2eAvwGKxFpKZlzf](http://www.gq.com/story/marc-hundley-interview?fbclid=PAAaYyCMR1LN9mm30bdfON4JXbMTy-qbem_SxSanpxHcy2eAvwGKxFpKZlzf).

## Artist Marc Hundley Recommends Finding Success After 40



Illustration by Armando Zaragoza

"There's a greater chance of feeling irrelevant if you get what you think you want," says Hundley, who talked to *GQ* columnist Chris Black about making "dumb art" and staying out until six a.m. in his 50s.

The artist, carpenter, photographer, and furniture designer Marc Hundley, 52, has been a New York City mainstay since relocating from Toronto to become a model with his twin brother, Ian, in 1992. You may have seen his beautiful furniture, which is inspired by Morris Golde's home on Water Island, or his iconic T-shirts with lyrics splashed across the front—his first was "I'm so bored with the USA," from The Clash. My favorite of his tees were inspired by The Smiths. I still have one that I purchased at Opening Ceremony in 2010; it says "To Be Gentle and Kind."

Hundley is also a fine artist. His paintings are often text-based, a logical step away from the T-shirts he was stenciling. His new show at Canada on Lispenard Street in Tribeca is called "The Vanity of Human Greatness." The opening, where I met a friend, was jam-packed, and I knew I would have to come back

for a proper look at the work. It's contemplative and ephemeral, combining phrases, ideas, and images that Hundley mixes for a referential and sophisticated result.

On one of those recent awful rainy days in New York City, Hundley traveled from his apartment in Williamsburg to meet me at Canada. We went to the gallery's spacious basement and discussed making art for a purpose, T-shirts as a medium, staying out really late, and why we should all hope for success to come later in life.

**GQ: Is this the most work you've ever shown?**

Marc Hundley: It's usually around 12 or 14 [pieces] if I do a show.

**Is that a number that you have in your head?**

No, it's just what I usually come up with. I'll think, I have to fill the walls with something, then I'll do 10 and realize there are a few more I want to do. But at some point, I'll realize, Okay, this is enough.

**Sure, you have to know when to self-edit. Does the gallery visit you?**

They're pretty "do whatever you want," which is great.

**That's how it should be. That's why we're all here.**

The last gallery I was with, I could tell there was a sales thing. They would come into my studio and say, "No one's going to buy that. No one's going to buy that..."

**And you don't care?**

Now, I care less.

**That is their job, but there's a much better way to do it. The directness of it is really funny, especially if you can handle it.**

I don't take it too seriously. I don't take all of it too seriously. It's a hopeful job. I make furniture, too, but I usually make it for someone. With art, I make it for a show. I don't just make it. I write things down all the time, so the inspiration goes somewhere, but I don't really make much unless I know where it's going.

**Less waste, baby.**

But it's all sort of hopeful. You make something, maybe someone will buy it. I try to have fun doing it, and then I'll do a real job.

**Have you ever had a real job?**

I was a photographer. I do carpentry. I'm a carpenter, pretty much. That's what I do, and that's what I rely on for money. But I was a still-life photographer for six years. Now, I just do it for myself. I'll still use it, but I act like it's found. I'll go through all my photos like, okay, I need a guy who looks depressed, or

whatever. I'll mine my own photos. Usually, I try to abstract the person a little bit so you don't see too much. It's more projectable if you can't tell who it is. It's almost like the "he/she" in a love song. You project yourself onto the thing.

**So much of your work is text-based. Growing up with hardcore and punk, flyers were a big part of my life, so it resonates with me.**

I love a dumb poster on a black telephone pole. Those are so cool— that ephemeral kind of thing. It doesn't look like it's worth anything. If you take the money out of it, it's like, "Hey, if you don't like it, throw it in the garbage. If you like it, put it on your fridge. Who cares?"

**It's your choice.**

Yeah, because it's not like, "Oh, my God, this is going to be worth something, so I like it." With art, I think about the audience, but I don't really care if they like it or not. I just have to do it.

**You feel compelled. You have to get it done.**

It's just dumb art.

**Does the carpentry and furniture-making all feel the same to you?**

With furniture, it has to function. If it doesn't function, it fails. Whereas with art, did it fail? If it doesn't sell, does it fail? No. We don't know how it lives after you put it out in the world, but with furniture, there's a function. So that's why I like the idea of advertising because advertising works. You want the shoes.

**Shoes are an example that hits close to home for me.**

I went to school for graphic design for one year in Toronto. I wasn't ever a graphic designer.

**But do you have the baseline skills?**

It was before it was computers, so it was all paste stuff, which is exactly what I do for art. I like thinking of myself as a hack graphic designer who never got hired for any jobs, and I'm still working on my portfolio, coming up with dumb ideas for posters.

**I have one of your T-shirts from back in the day.**

That was the first thing I did.

**Was that a nice way in? Did it feel less intimidating?**

It was the '90s. Everyone was wearing trucker hats and T-shirts and everything. I thought, Oh, my God, these people tortured me in high school, but they're all my friends now. Giuliani was shutting down the clubs, so I made The Clash T-shirt, "I'm So Bored With the USA." I would wear it out, and people would

react to it. I thought, This is a good way to communicate how I feel, but I got to cover it up by saying, "It's just a Clash shirt."

**"This isn't me."**

"This is a T-shirt. I'm not saying it." But you are saying it. When you wear a Nike shirt, you're advertising for Nike. When I'm wearing that shirt, I'm advertising the thing I'm choosing to wear. It's not precious, there's nothing original about it, it's not art with a capital A— it's not even considered art. No one's ever said, "I just saw a T-shirt someone made, and it's offensive or irresponsible!" No one cares. Which I think is great.

**It's freeing.**

I don't think people make a choice, like "I'm going to advertise that brand—"

**No, but they think about what it means. It's more like, "I wear Nike because that's what I relate to." But I do think it's a choice people are making, and it's nice if they can relate to something that isn't a brand. A statement and a brand are two different things. Do you still make shirts?**

Yeah. I love doing those because it's easy. It's a good way to get something off my chest. In the beginning, it was like, "I don't want to wear the Def Leppard T-shirt. I want to wear a Joni T-shirt or a Magnetic Fields T-shirt," which I related to. I started giving them to my friends to wear. Then my friend Matt Connors was showing movies in Williamsburg, and he was like, "Oh, would you mind making posters?" So, I did them the same way— just stencils. Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, Merchant Ivory's *Helen, Queen of the Nautch Girls*... But I realized, "Oh, wait, I can just do that with a T-shirt." Then I would do Smiths and Morrissey Night at Sway, where every Sunday I'd go and make a Smiths poster that expressed how I was feeling— about Bush's reelection and all that stuff. I'd just express it, hide it in a Smiths poster, go to Sway, and just give it to my friends. It was perfect. I expressed myself. They go home, put it on their fridge, throw it out, do whatever—I'm just getting it out.

**You've expressed that a few times, that you've just got to get it out. It's a good impulse, and I think people feel that.**

Yeah, sometimes I want to do it and don't have to do it, but I'm often like, okay, I just have to deal with this. Say my friend's dying or whatever it is. "Let's make something." It alleviates, the action you take.

**Do you still go out?**

Dancing and stuff? Yeah. Definitely.

**How late can you stay up?**

Well, I got home at 6:30 on Saturday. I still like going for it. I don't do it all the time, but I used to.

**6:30?! What party was this?**

Wrecked at Basement. It's underneath Knockdown Center. It's a raunchy gay night.

**It's cool that you can stay out. I can't do that anymore. I don't have it in me.**

There are things that help.

**Of course. That shapes us so much at a younger age. When I moved to New York, and I was at Lit or Black and White or whatever.... It's crazy to think how big that part of my life was.**

When you're younger, you get to the city, and being bad is interesting. You meet cool people, you go out all the time, and you're kind of bad. Then, it's not as interesting after a while, and switching it up and being sober becomes interesting. You just want to be interested. That's what humans want to be. Interested. Interested in getting out of bed in the morning. Not being interested is on the side of depression.

**That's where you go to die. I had to stay up till two in the morning last week. There was an *Interview* magazine party, and I stayed out and had a great time, but I couldn't stop thinking about how late it was. I couldn't let myself enjoy it. "Okay, well, I'll have to get up for the gym at eight," which is silly because it's not that big of a deal. No one's going to die if I wake up an hour later. But that part of aging is so funny because it's such a formative experience, and then you just let it go because it's really for young people.**

Yeah. Especially in this country. In other countries, the age thing is different. Old country: Old is good. Young country, young is good. We put so much value on youth, but most people don't start doing anything interesting until they're 50. It's good not to be recognized for anything you do until you're at least 40.

**You're still getting the ya-ya's out up until that point.**

There's a greater chance of feeling irrelevant if you get what you think you want that early.

**That's true. You see people that have such a hard time with it. Young success can be a curse.**

Fuck off for 40 years and then get success. You'll feel young again.