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## Butts, body paint and emojis: Making high art from life

<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/12/arts/olaf-breuning/>



Naked models covered in body paint; Vikings posing with surfboards; hideously distorted digital images -- the work of Swiss artist Olaf Breuning is as eye-catching and provocative as it is diverse.

From spaghetti to skeletons, sand to colored smoke, it seems that no material is off limits for use in his creations.

Working across various artistic genres including photography, sculpture, collage, performance and video art, the artist's seemingly disparate work is unified by a shared visual language, referencing art history and appropriating elements of pop and media culture.

It is also characterized by a somewhat absurd sense of humor and irony.

"You have to know that the Swiss sense of humor tends to be more wacky and absurd and the jokes more subtle and less vicious. Many Swiss artists share this brand of wacky humor," wrote Alan Bieber in the introduction of a recent book on Breuning's work, containing over 200 images.



Born in 1970 in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, Breuning's interest in image making began when his father gave him a camera at the age of 16. He trained as a photographer, studying at the Zurich University of the Arts, before stepping into the art world in the early '90s.

Over the course of his career, the New York-based artist has traveled around the world to create and exhibit his work.

In June 2016, the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf presented a retrospective of his work to date -- bringing together a wide range of pieces including the video trilogy "Home" (2004-

2007), which follows a cliched Western tourist as he travels the world; "Art Freaks" (2011) a series in which Breuning painted naked models to look like works by famous artists from the last 150 years; and "The Life" (2015), large photo collages that use objects and imagery from our everyday lives.

Despite references to contemporary and pop culture in many of his pieces, Bieber believes Breuning's does not feel dated. "His works defy any kind of categorization and, moreover, he continues to reinvent himself -- this is precisely what makes him so unique. His art is his life and his life is his art," he wrote.