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Via YouTube, it's the Kalm Report

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NEW YORK -- One of the signatures of a James Kalm review is the heavy breathing.

The all-weather video art critic invariably arrives at the gallery or museum on his stripped-down mountain bike, so for the first few moments of his commentary, he's often short of breath.

"Hi, this is the guy on the bike again, with another half-assed Kalm Report" is a typical introduction to one of his pieces, as the image from his tiny video camera careens a little sloppily around the street before settling in on the nameplate of the gallery or a museum poster advertising today's exhibition. The Kalm's-eye view of his hand pushing open the gallery door is another trademark.

Kalm, a 56-year-old Brooklynite whose real name is Loren Munk, fills a niche in the New York art world that falls somewhere between the highbrow critics for the glossy art magazines and the cranky, score-settling commentators of the blogosphere. He is married, with two adult sons.

With more than 190 short video reviews on YouTube just a year and a half after learning to operate his videocam and edit the results, Kalm has gained an online following from people who don't live in New York or don't have time for gallery hopping yet want to sample the city's lively and varied art scene. He records the noisy opening-night parties, with their shouted greetings and clinking wine glasses. He captures the sunlit rooms where technicians and gallerists are making last-minute decisions about how to install work. And he has moments in nearly empty galleries where it's just Kalm and the art, where he brings the viewer along for a quiet chat about the background of the artist and the way the work is put together.

There isn't any money in it, although Kalm dreams vaguely of advertising or foundation grants. "In a way, it's almost anti-commercial," said Kalm, who also writes a print column in the *Brooklyn Rail*, a weekly tabloid that covers arts and politics.

A painter himself and a voracious consumer of art, Kalm easily describes paint-layering techniques, offering comparisons to the work of other artists. Yet he mainly functions as a man on the street who loves art but perhaps hasn't made up his mind about the art scene. A high school student from Tennessee once recognized Kalm on the street in Manhattan because the student had been assigned to watch three Kalm Reports for art class homework.

Kalm can be a curmudgeon. He has been thrown out of some of New York's finest galleries -- and he has the video to prove it. His camera, about the size of a deck of cards, is looped around his neck on a metal coil, lending itself to the stealth approach when he feels it necessary. "Sometimes I just turn it on and walk around with it hanging on my chest," he said.

But stealth is just one arrow in the Kalm quiver.

On Monday, he adopted the frontal approach for the media opening of a sculpture show by super-successful Pop artist Jeff Koons, held at the Cantor Roof Garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The morning was gray, cold and threatening, but midway through the two-hour event, the sun broke through and utterly changed the look of Koons' sculpture -- three monumental, high-chromium stainless steel pieces, painted and polished laboriously to a mirror finish. The works are privately owned and never before displayed, although one, "Balloon Dog (Yellow)," which looks like a balloon animal twisted into shape by a gigantic clown, is one of a series shown in Venice, Italy, and elsewhere (including a blue one owned by Eli Broad, currently on view at the Broad Contemporary Art Museum at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

On this day, Koons appeared resplendent in an almost glossy gray suit, blue dress shirt, blue striped tie and a short haircut with just a hint of a moussed upturn at the front. He spoke very softly. He was very polite. Standing in front of his "Sacred Heart (Red/Gold)" -- a 12-foot-tall, stainless steel sculpture that looks like a giant chocolate heart, gift-wrapped in scarlet cellophane, he addressed a couple of reporters. The artist said he liked being shown at the Met, where his pieces can "have a dialogue" with works from the museum's renowned classical collection. He imagined "Sacred Heart" having such an interaction with some of the "Medieval or Early Christian" art on the floors below.

As the artist spoke, Kalm edged forward with his camera to his eye. "That suit is almost as shiny as his sculpture," he murmured, as the camera glided from Koons' shoes to his shoulders and back down for a close-up of the five-button cuff of his sleeve. "Nice detail," Kalm went on, almost to himself.

Koons set the tone for most of the press' questioning with his serious comments about the theory behind his art. Then Kalm lifted his camera above a cluster of journalists and said rather loudly: "Would you comment for the Kalm Report, sir?" Noting that a Koons piece had sold for \$23.6 million at Sotheby's last November, a record auction price for a work by a living artist, Kalm asked whether people "are too obsessed by the art market now?"

"I didn't sell the work. A collector sold the work," Koons replied, smiling politely. "I think about the production of work, I think about the opportunity for the work. But I really don't get involved with the art market."

"You don't get involved with the art market?" Kalm repeated, his incredulity registering.

"When I say involved with it -- I'm not preoccupied with it," Koons responded.

It's a moment that won't be captured elsewhere.

But the Kalm Report isn't mainly about capturing wealthy artists in uncomfortable moments.

"What I see my job as is showing people what the real art world is," Kalm said. "The art objects, the museums, the galleries -- that's part of it, but almost the more important part of it is the people and their relationships and all those other things that make up the art world."

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