

Who Names An Artist?

Andrew Glenn

What is in an artist's name? Throughout art history the artist has claimed and promoted their work by the use of his or her chosen name. In today's contemporary art world, why is there confusion in using the name I want associated with my artwork? I am not doing anything new; art history is full of various uses of a name.

As an artist I could have easily decided to go by Andrew William Glenn, Andrew W. Glenn, A. William Glenn, A. W. Glenn, Andrew Glenn, Andy Glenn, etc.

I am not combining my first and last name to create a new name such as Man Ray (Emmanuel Ray) did early in his career. His birth name is Emmanuel Rudnitsky, but in the early twentieth century his family took the surname Ray. Nor am I using a pseudonym. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret painted under his real name as a Purist. When he pursued architecture he chose to use the pseudonym Le Corbusier, derived from his grandfather's name of Le Corbesier. I am also not being a rebel like Gaspard Félix Tournachon and adopting a name. His adopted name is Nadar. One must ask themselves if they recognize a Nadar photograph as that of Nadar or of Tournachon. Is a Purist painting by Jeanneret the same as one by Le Corbusier? Is a building designed by Le Corbusier or Jeanneret?

A name is what a career is built upon. Are the accomplishments of Michelangelo Merisi as impressive as that of Caravaggio? Even though Michelangelo Merisi is Caravaggio the answer should be no. Caravaggio is the name and man behind the Italian works of art. Many artists, such as Caravaggio, were better known by the name of where they were from rather than their birth name. Other examples are El Greco (Doménikos Theotokópoulos) and Veronese (Paolo Cagliari). Again these names can be seen as pseudonyms. Or perhaps history has anglicized a name such as Titian (Tiziano Vecelli).

The artists of today seem to push names in another direction. Many contemporary artists are individualizing their names by getting more specific with middle initials or entire middle names in addition to using their first and last names. I know this is nothing new, but it appears to be more common place. Everyone wants to be the Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres or John Singer Sargent of the art world. There is nothing wrong with that as long as the name doesn't detract from the work of art. How often do you see a signed work of art where it seems more time was spent on the signature rather than the piece of work? The irony to me is the name is the least important part of artwork, especially mine. Great artworks aren't considered masterworks because of who signed it, but rather the accomplishments in the piece. Let it be said I am not comparing my work to those of the masters.

The name I am using as a professional artist is AWG. At first this may seem odd and perhaps a pseudonym. It is purely an acronym. My legal name by birth is Andrew William Glenn. Often, on legal documents I initial areas of agreement instead of signing. These initials carry the same weight as a signature. AWG is simply a condensed version of my own legal name. As an artist I could have easily decided to go by Andrew William Glenn, Andrew W. Glenn, A. William Glenn, A. W. Glenn, Andrew Glenn, Andy Glenn, etc., but I didn't. I decided years ago, in my first year of graduate school, to only use AWG as my name in the pursuit of my professional career. I never really liked the aesthetic quality of my name and

thoroughly evaluated the relevance of using my initials. To me it seemed to fit the style, content, and even aesthetics of my artwork. I didn't become an artist to be famous, but rather to provoke thought. So far it has been an uphill adventure to be known as AWG.

At my graduate thesis show the museum installed my full name, Andrew W. Glenn, on the wall instead of AWG. This would have caused confusion with relating the artwork to the artist since all press releases, announcements and show cards had been released, as I intended, as AWG. Even at the gallery talk I was introduced as Andrew Glenn and A-W-G and AWG. AWG would have sufficed. Juried shows usually pose no problem. I always fill out all forms in the prospectus using my name AWG in any space that asks for a name. Sometimes the check used to pay the juried fees will cause confusion since my legal name is printed on the check. This has resulted in me writing in AWG on the check. Since the check has my legal name on it, they assume that is what I want on the exhibition record. Solo shows have not been a problem since I work directly with the gallery in promoting and installing the show. Any cover letters, statements, proposals or resumes I use contain AWG. I had never thought the art world would want to name me as they see fit and are accustomed. Who are they to name me and my work? I created it.

- AWG