

# INTERVIEW

**John Sutton, Ben Beres, Zac Culler and Nancy Guppy  
Recorded at On the Boards, August 2011**

**NG: This is awkward...I'm very awkward! It's like - don't put your hand there! Zac!**

ZC: Sorry...

**NG: So we're here with SuttonBeresCuller. So John Sutton, Zac Culler, Ben Beres.  
Why is your name, Sutton, first in the name thing?**

JS: It just worked out that way.

**NG: It just worked out that way. Yeah**

BB: We used to change it every major show and it was just too much of a pain in the ass.

**NG: Of course it was! And SuttonBeresCuller just kind of flows off the tongue.**

BB: It does. I liked BeresBeresBeres...but...

**NG: I don't know why Guppy isn't a part of it.**

JS: Neither of your brothers are talented...so they won't listen -

**NG: You guys, so I know you're working on a new piece - you're kicking off On the Boards's  
new season.**

JS: We are.

**NG: Pressure? Nervous?**

JS: Yes, yes

**NG: This is going to set the standard for the whole season. If this isn't good, the whole thing  
is going downhill. [laughter] Watch out!**

BB: Or everything looks much better!

**NG: Glass half full. That's Ben Beres. Very glass-half-full. Well, so it's called *To Be  
Determined*. That's what's in the brochure, when they printed this thing, you called it  
*To Be Determined*.**

ZC: Yes.

JS: It's still the name.

**NG: That's the nature of improv! "Yes, and." Always. Always you have to build, "yes, and". Ok, now, I'm going to step back a little farther and talk about - what hospitals were you born in? No - we're not gonna talk about that. Did any of you have any problems when you were born? Any problems...when you came out of your mother? [laughter] No, no - that's a different show. That's not a good question.**

BB: Did you?

**NG: I was like a month premie. I was tiny.**

BB: I think I was probably perfect.

**NG: But for the three people in this world who aren't familiar with SBC, SuttonBeresCuller, let's give kind of a context of what you guys are about. You met at Cornish College of the Arts. What year?**

ZC: 1999? '98? '97? Somewhere in that time frame.

**NG: And did you all like each other right away? Did you kind of have a view of art or creativity in the same way?**

ZC: Yeah. We were naive.

**NG: Well, you always when you're young. In art school. Did you think you were gonna change the world or something?**

BB: Yeah, totally. But probably all individually.

**NG: Oh, change it individually. What's the power of three, then?**

BB: Well, it simply became that when we started needing help on bigger sculptures, bigger projects. And then we went out and did an outdoor arts festival, and we were doing some bigger things at Cornish. And we were like, let's do another thing here, and it just kind of snowballed into 11, 12 years later. Stuck with each other.

**NG: Yeah. Good and bad. It's like marriage, yes? In a lot of ways. It's that creative thing. What - maybe you'll have jokes for this, maybe you won't - if you said, kind of, here's my strength: Ben's strength, John's strength, Zac's strength - is there a way you could kind of define that? Or is that too linear?**

JS: I think that's too linear. I think that we pull each other in a lot of different directions, we surprise each other in things that we bring to the table, different projects, but it's always changing. As with each project. Like the parameters, the materials, the things that we're playing with. We don't just tend to stick to the same process over and over again, and so we're always doing different things throughout that.

**NG: Zac, do you want to say something?**

ZC: No, I agree with that. I'd say I'm more the idea man. Builder. Brains.

**NG: Integrity. Kind of - whole person. Spiritual guru.**

ZC: Yeah. And then I keep John and Ben around to do interviews.

**NG: Right. They speak for the Master. i.e., you.**

ZC: Exactly.

**NG: Right, right. How does that make you feel, John?**

JS: It's totally rings true.

**NG: So there's no conflict with that.**

BB: No. We signed a contract and we can't speak about it. [laughter]

**NG: Hey, do you guys make money at what you do? [laughter] Artistes?**

JS: We get the occasional free lunch.

ZC: It's not really a free lunch, though. It's just lunch.

**NG: What do you mean it's not free?**

BB: Because we're working for it.

**NG: You're working for it, right. You did get a free beer...well...it's not really that free.**

ZC: We're putting on a show for them, so they should give us a beer.

**NG: You do get a free beer, on occasion. When you look back at all the pieces you've done - how many have you done now? Big kind of shows or installs?**

ZC: Four or five hundred?

**NG: About? Is there anything that you say, man, I wish we would have done that different?**

JS: Of course. Each project kind of leads up to the next thing in many ways, and it's like, oh, next time it'll be this! And then we find ourselves working on something completely different and we're never really going back. And so a big part of our process as of late has been project, project - really large things. And we don't really have a traditional studio practice in the broadest sense of the term -

**NG: What does that mean, the broadest sense of the word?**

JS: We don't have like a big, shared studio that we meet at every day and create work. We come together to work on projects, we initiate smaller projects or littler works while we're working on bigger things, but I think like, the process, as that entails that we finish one project, we move on, we start planning the next one. And so there's always ideas, there's always like the sketchbook things that aren't necessarily building on the last thing because they're so disparate.

BB: I feel like a lot of the time we put too much work into things. Where we realize that we could have actually done less work on certain aspects of it. Taking time - spending a lot of time on things that no one ever sees. I mean, it's a weird Catch-22, because -

**NG: Well, that \*is\* a weird Catch-22, because your work is so specific and detailed - at least, that's my perception and my enjoyment of your work - which, I do enjoy it - is that it's extremely detailed. Down to - I mean, like "Chinese Restaurant", right? Every place you looked, it was like, yeah, this is like a kind of grimy but cool kind of dive-o chinese restaurant. Every corner of the install. It was incredible to me!**

JS: The moment we don't focus on the details is when somebody's going to notice that something isn't quite done, or that little detail, or whatever it is. I mean, that's something that I really like about the work that we do, is that there's three of us, and I guess that the different personalities, different things, is that we all have different focus on details. I might be focused on one type of detail, Ben is focused on another, Zac is on another, and at the end of it we've addressed all of those. The texture, the construction, the angles, the finish. Things that I might not have patience for, Ben does. It's vice versa. So -

**NG: Well, that's why you guys are so good. That truly is why you're so good, I think. I mean, obviously you've got ideas, and you've got great vision. But your execution is spectacular.**

BB: Well, we try. We try.

**NG: Well, yeah. If you didn't, what would be the point. Don't you think? I mean, at least for me. I'm very anal-retentive. I like perfection. I don't hit it often. But I like it when I say, I did the very best I could, I could not have done that better. Even though someone could say, yeah, well, it could've been better. But I couldn't have done more.**

BB: And we look at a lot of art. When you walk in and you see, like, crappily built canvases or things that just look unfinished, it's really frustrating, I think.

JS: We are our strongest critics, I guess. When we're building something, or conceiving something, or talking about something, like, we are critiquing each other's process in part -

BB: "You suck!" [laughter]

**NG: Is it brutal? Is it ever brutal? Or - do you kind of fight?**

JS: It can get heated. It's not brutal. It's like...we all are trying to collectively create work under our collected names, so we all have strong opinions at times on what we want those to be. But it's the better for it, coming out of that process.

**NG: So that kind of bloody cut on your forehead has nothing to do with -**

JS: Zac every few projects like hits me with a hammer, or does something -

**NG: Snaps?**

ZC: I hit John in the head with a hammer. I did.

**NG: I like that - I mean, I don't even want to explain it. Let's just keep it at that and move forward! Who do you guys like as artists? Who turns you on? You say that you like to look at a lot of art.**

JS: I don't like art anymore.

BB: I really like - uh- I mean, we could just name off a bunch, like Ann Hamilton and James Turrell, Matthew Barney, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci -

JS: Santiago Sierra - the list goes on and on. I mean, we're I think interested in a lot of art that happened I think historically and temporary, but also just our environment, our day-to-day lives. Our surroundings. We draw a lot of inspiration from simple materials, simple interactions, the way people kind of navigate space and each other, like social interactions. I think a lot of our works have been performative in nature - I mean, they've been sculptural objects that have invited people to have at them, or look at them in different ways - that kind of interaction has always been really intriguing to us, and I think that's coming into this project a lot.

BB: We like to see, I mean, we want to be entertained too. We don't want to, like, just build a sculpture and watch people look at it. We want to enjoy the experience as well.

**NG: Uh huh. You guys, I know you probably vote - I'm guessing - you vote Democrat or you kind of tend towards the left. Am I right about that?**

ZC: Yes.

JS: Yes.

BB: What's voting?

**NG: [laughs] If, however, you put together the perfect Republican ticket, ok, for the Presidential ticket, who would you want it to be?**

JS: that I would want to get elected?

**NG: Well, either way. I'm not going to put any more parameters. Whether you want them to be elected, or -**

BB: Palin and Bachman would be pretty awesome.

ZC: Yeah, Palin and Bachman.

BB: It would be so awesome to watch.

JS: Paul/Palin.

**NG: Paul/Palin! Ron Paul. Sarah Palin. Wow, that would be interesting. He is an interesting guy.**

JS: He's the only one I've seen out there that is actually articulate and has strong opinions.

**NG: He says things that -**

JS: It's not talking points. It's actually policy.

BB: What about LaRouche? LaRouche and Paul.

**NG: I didn't know he was alive still. Well, ok, Palin, Bachman -**

BB: WE just got some LaRouchie fans.

**NG: You do? Oh, you just got them right now. They're going to be here at the show! Well, uh, is there anything else we should talk about? Do you have anything else you want to say to your legions of fans?**

BB: We don't have legions.

**NG: You have legions! You guys are adored! You're adored, and you're liked, and you're loved. Both for the work, and you as people.**

JS: Thank you.

**NG: It's true! Duh!**

JS: We spent the last month-plus in a dark, dark room and it's affecting our psyches.

**NG: So really when the show opens, regardless of what happens, the light and the air is going to come in, the energy from the audience, and I'm guessing that will be -**

ZC: Yeah, we're really looking forward to opening the doors.

JS: And also seeing it for the first time. Like Ben was saying before, we in some ways are like, pulling the strings on a lot of these things, but we will not see much of this for the first time, in its completion, until opening night when everybody else does.

ZC: We just set it in motion.

**NG: Ok, so let's end it with, if you could, like each of you come up with like the tagline for the show. Like the PR tagline. *To Be Determined*:**

BB: "COME BE AMAZED!"

**NG: Zac?**

ZC: Uh..."it's going to be an extravaganza."

BB: It's true, it's true.

**NG: John?**

JS: "*To Be Determined*: it's going to be a cornucopia of experiences."

**NG: I love it.**

BB: Wait, I want to do one more. "*To Be Determined*: bring your wallet." [laughter]

JS: "*To Be Determined*: Come with your dancing shoes on."

**NG: Yeah! And your wallet.**

BB: Two wallets.

JS: Possibly a couple of nickels.

BB: You might need nickels.

**NG: Okaay...you're dropping more and more hints.**

BB: The lower the beer gets...

**NG: ok, well I think that was fabulous! Shall we end it with a "go team"? Ok, let's all put our hands in -**

ALL: Go, team!

