

Interview with Jeremy Day, Art Students League of New York, 2014

When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

I've known I wanted to be an artist since I was a boy. It was only until about three years ago that I decided to make some major changes in my life in order to study drawing and painting full time. I started looking into the possibility of going to school on the GI Bill and after a lot of research and planning I made the decision to quit my job and move to New York to take classes here at the League.

Where did you study; your background training?

In my junior year of high school I started post-secondary enrollment at Minneapolis College of Art and Design taking life drawing and foundation classes. After high school I continued taking art courses at Normandale Community College for about a year. I spent the next several years working off and on at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, installing exhibitions and handling art. I would draw and paint in the evenings, look through art books and read about the artists I admired. In 2003, I joined the military but regularly drew in sketchbooks and managed to make small paintings in my free time. Before moving to New York I studied with David Jamieson at Vitruvian Studio in Chicago.

Who was your mentor?

My four instructors are Michael Grimaldi, Harvey Dinnerstein, Costa Vavagiakis, and Andy Reiss. Although my time is spread out between them, I consider all of them to be equally important in terms of my artistic training.

What is your medium and why? How did your medium speak to you?

I'm learning to paint in oil and sometimes I make small watercolors in a pocket sketchbook. I like to draw in graphite, crayon, pastel and charcoal, sometimes mixing them on the same drawing. There is the obvious reason of choosing a graphite pencil to make a drawing, which is the reliability of it, the portability and the simplicity. But also I like to know that out of the tip of the pencil comes a single line and that all of my drawings are made of these single lines collected, smudged and layered together. Each pencil has potentially dozens of drawings inside of it. There is a beauty in taking a pencil and rendering an image on a page and with a few dozen lines that object can seem round or heavy or if you work really hard it can look back at you.

What or who is your inspiration?

My instructors inspire me. A beautiful woman inspires me. A painting. A comfortable feeling. A memory or nostalgia can be inspiring. Thinking about everything and questioning everything and not always knowing why something is the way that it is. Loving and being loved inspires me. Inspiration to make a drawing can be the weirdest thing. Not every drawing is inspired, though, most of it happens mysteriously. Inspiration is often easier to see after everything is finished and put away.

What was the turning point or significant event in your artistic life or life in general?

I would really love to know. It would be tough for me to choose one thing over another in the bigger scheme of my life. The turning point that led me to the present moment. That is something I think about a lot, turning points, the course our lives take based on the decisions we make or avoid making. Honestly, I try to begin each day as if it was the most important moment in my life. Moving to New York felt pretty significant. I'm still hoping that pans out.

What keeps motivating you to make art?

I don't know. The more I learn, the more efficient I become and the better the drawing gets. But the better I become, the more critical I am and the harder I push myself. So, that is a circular pattern of self-motivation. I don't know. Sometimes I'm more interested in the way of seeing and living than I am about making this thing we call art. The tangible drawing on a page is a product of that personal experience, living and seeing, the evidence of some sort of struggle or investigation or interaction or interpretation or a way of saying that I was here and I did this. But without the drawing on a page none of this really makes any sense, so, maybe the motivation comes from the desire to copy nature or achieve a certain level of verisimilitude or to make a drawing that resembles something by Degas or Rubens or just a challenge to make a better drawing than before or to make a better drawing than so-and-so.

What life lessons has being an artist taught you?

As an art student I've been learning how to budget my time. My time in the studio and my time on Earth. I've learned how to focus myself and stay focused. How to find the focus when I lose it. I've learned why I am focusing in the first place. Being an art student teaches me how to persist in other ways, many of them physical, dealing with hunger and sleeplessness and fatigue and countless other questions of purpose, loneliness and despair. How to love and keep loving and then keep on loving more. How to know what is important and what has no importance whatsoever. And not because anybody else says so, but because I know it to be that way. Learning that a success can be found simply by putting in the time on a project and being present, working hard. Each day should be met with the appropriate desire to make use of it and if you can muster the energy to keep going for many days you're eventually going

to find out that success is not impossible. Being an art student may not teach me all of these things, but it teaches me to look around and pay attention and to keep going.

If money was not an issue, what is your dream project?

I don't have a dream project, but I daydream about having a studio somewhere upstate, waking early in the morning and going straight to work, stopping for a quick lunch and then working through til evening. After dinner we would go for a short walk through the woods and then I would build a fire, pour another glass of wine and look at the night sky.