

Brief Bio

John Martinek resides in Coralville, Iowa where he paints, draws, and makes prints in his studio. Apart from traveling and art making, his other interests include competitive cycling, carpentry, cooking, reading, listening to music, and spending time with family and friends. During the weekdays he works for McDonough Structures in Iowa City as a project manager and cabinetmaker. His partner Greta Songe teaches art at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, and his son Emmett is two years old.

John was born in Metairie, Louisiana in 1968, but grew up in Grinnell, Iowa before leaving to attend college. He received his BA in art from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois in 1990. In 1996 he received his MFA in Printmaking and Drawing from the University of Iowa.

More to the story....

In 1994 I took my first trip abroad to Africa and it inspired a deep love for international travel. While spending a month visiting a friend in the Peace Corps we traveled all over the place by taxi, bus, and on foot. I entered Africa as an extremely “green” and inexperienced tourist and was immediately robbed of \$500 and return plane ticket in the confusion and chaos at the airport. In Africa under extremely unusual (for an American) travel conditions I gradually became more seasoned and it cracked my mind wide open. This is the place where I first made the connection between travel and the process of making art (of the journey as the destination). In the end I had many memorable experiences including sleeping on the Burkina Faso border, food poisoning on an 8 hour psychedelic bus ride into Mali, and hiking for hours off the road and into the bush to spend the day celebrating with a small village community in Ghana.

In 1995 I embarked on a European trip that was great privilege as I was able to travel and make art every day. Starting in Venice, I spent one month studying printmaking at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica Di Venezia. After a month exploring the depths of Venice, I continued on to visit 11 countries over the next four months and enjoyed wanderlust and the experience of deep immersion travel for an extended period. At this time I visited many major European museums and art collections, and drew and painted almost every day. At the end of the trip I visited Turkey which set up the next pivotal phase in my life.

In 1996 I returned to Iowa to finish my MFA. At that time I had a friend living and working in Turkey and he arranged for me to take his position starting in the fall. That spring I finished my studies and moved to Bursa, Turkey in September. I spent the next two and a half years living and working in Turkey. This was the most amazing and interesting period of my life. Learning Turkish and teaching in a foreign language was an extremely challenging and rewarding experience. I met many people while living on campus and became a part of the community there. Fortunately I was able to travel all over Turkey on a true insider’s journey. I was invited to spend many private occasions with different families including weddings, circumcision

ceremonies, and New Years Eve. While there I maintained a studio, exhibited actively, and developed friendships with many artists.

In 1999 I decided to move back to Iowa City. To earn a living I became established as a local cabinetmaker and over the next 5 years and grew and expanded this business. I continued to work on and show art but I was more focused on woodworking and carpentry during this period. Eventually I decided to merge with bigger company and became a project manager for McDonough Structures in Iowa City. Currently I manage and oversee all kinds of homebuilding and remodeling projects for this well established and successful design/build firm.

Over the years my interest in international travel has continued. I revisited Turkey many times from 1999 to 2008. In the fall of 2009 I travelled to Belgium to make art and taste beer. In 2013 I spent three weeks with my partner Greta Songe traveling through the Czech Republic, Vienna, Slovenia, and Croatia. We had a wonderful time drawing, eating, and enjoying life.

In 2014 my son Emmet was born and I can truly say that was a life changing event (for the better). Needless to say 2014-2015 saw a significant drop in art production as all brain power was required to get him started off in life on the right foot, and to try and sleep whenever possible. He has brought us a fresh outlook on life and has reinforced the power of play and curiosity in our lives.

Over the years I have had many exhibitions (see resume) but most recently in 2015 I had two solo exhibitions in Cedar Rapids. The first one was at Kirkwood Community College and the second at CSPA. By the fall of 2015 I had returned to working regularly in the studio and in early 2016 purchased a tabletop Takach printmaking press!

In 2016 I became a board member at the Iowa Children's Museum. This has been invigorating too as I have been selected to serve on a committee that is developing an exciting new exhibit. It's a fun and complex concept to work on as it involves science, design, construction, and art. Working with a great group of very smart people I have become obsessed with the brainstorming process and can't wait to see the results of our collaboration.