

Daniel Heidkamp interviews Alicia Gibson 2020

Is it true that as a teenager you competed as a downhill skier ? that's pretty daring! tell me about that ? and good stories ?how do lessons you learned there relate to your work and studio today ?

This is true. I was a competing a few years after I started skiing at age 5. I spent my junior year in high school at Carrabassett Ski Academy in Maine. It was rough. We would wake at 5am, run for 5 miles, then hit the slopes to train for the rest of the day. Giant slalom was my favorite. Slalom was too tight and Downhill was kinda a scary free for all. These are metaphors for art approaches as well btw.

One antidote from that time is how after reading the Anarchist Cookbook, I decided to smoke peanut skins and then other girls joined in. Only a headache. Someone snitched and we were all barred from the next race. The girls were pissed-like I forced them to lol. Bode Miller was trying there at the same time, was told by a previous conquest to stay away as he got around. He went on to the win olympic stuff.

I also had horses and competed in hunter jumper, earned a black belt in tae kwon do, was on my hs softball team as catcher which I loved - even though I never liked Catcher in the Rye, tennis team too etc. Yes, I was a grunge genre loving jock. Eventually, burned out of sports, but not art, perhaps bc there are so many variations..I do believe sports taught me dedication to the craft and extended periods of working. Also, perseverance and being able to put blinders on and focus. Work ethic really..but my knees are shot.

i remember when we met at art school in boston you had a little gang with some of the other students called ' ladies in heels', then when you were at Hunter you had another crew , was it the ' shit talkin club' ? lol. Are you in a gang now ? (what is this urge to form art gangs and how does it affect your work , sometimes in the paintings are almost like punchlines to inside jokes , or like secret passwords to get initiated into the gang.. discuss !)

Yeah, I was 21 in a post-bac year at SMFA. I went to my first bar that year wearing heels for the first/last time and was kicked out pretty fast, guess they thought I was drunk, just couldn't walk in the stupid things. Then formed a girl gang, Ladies in Heels with a couple of my female friends. We just biked recklessly around, writing really crappy graffiti. I wrote Jeff Koons Sux and Diet Coke mainly. It was kinda empowering, mostly silly.

Ha, when I first got to Hunter for my MFA I made a zine to compile my thoughts. So I created a Shit Thinking Club, I Never Asked to be Born Club, Leftist Tendencies Club

and also a non-functioning Existential Hotline etc..I was not only the only member but also the president.

There is Shit Talking Club 2.0 painting in this show - "Shit Thinking Club" - jokes with myself and notes, what's on my mind, no conspiracy. Also Scorpio humor aka jokes at the expense of others to make myself laugh.

For sure all these things were satirical, but based from a real place that are either too complicated or difficult to discuss - now my paintings often veil something more sinister and almost sad.

Faux gangs provide safety in numbers. Now they're just in my head.

some artists look to history for inspiration, others to nature , you're known to draw upon personal experiences and relationships for source material , using specific examples can you describe how an episode in your life gets translated into the words and imagery in one of your paintings ? (from this group or other recent works !)

Personal experience seems the most honest approach in content and aesthetics to me and in a way cathartic. Of course, I look to art history but don't have a strong background in it. I learned mostly from, museums and peers.

A prime example of the personal approach illustrated in this book is the painting, "Go Back to College". On the surface, an observer might brush it off as I, the artist, is having doubts about being a human and is making a note to self to get yet another degree. The text is written over a painted lined notepad. While sometimes I work self-referentially, this piece is my reaction via internal anger toward a third party. In this case, the third party being a previous therapist who made so many mistakes, some dangerous to my being. So yeah, though he had gone to an Ivy and med school, the 'take away' was "Go Back to College" dude.

The imagery often stems from paraphernalia I collect, catalogs, still lives, etc. while the text often comes from my perception of a situation.

Scorpions exist in the dark but gravitate toward the light and that's usually how my paintings are made. A grave situation is processed for a varied amount of time until it's worked out in my mind and can be summarized into a comical phrase. Really, it's satire. All the works come from a real place and are not created for the sake of a painting but to clear my mind. Or maybe, it's just how my mind works - through ruminations - to make sense of something and hope people can relate.

you mentioned you use some art history in your work please give me examples of that , additionally i often see pop references anywhere from eminen and townes van sant, to ayn rand , are you pointing to a version of Americana , almost in a folk art sense, but

then subverting it with a ironic awareness that reveals shades of toxic culture, then rendering it in richly colored oils with an eye towards beauty? please discuss

Sure Dan, I tend to appreciate artists whom remind of something that already exists in myself and draw out qualities that I had forgotten were there. I love the jagged unsettling edges of Clyfford Still. The breeze and humor of Walter Swennen. The Blips and Ifs of Stuart Davis. How Margaret Kilgallen brought text and the street into the gallery. Oyvind Fahlstrom was the first art book I purchased and remains the constant for his satire, colors, arrangement, and concreteness. I don't literally "Copy Dead Artists" - a title of a painting in this book - which is more of a blow towards those who do rather than a note to self.

My subject matter stems from a sincere, often nostalgic place. I'm not super interested in pop culture as an umbrella, but I choose people whom I am a fan of. Things and people that keep me safe in an abstract manner and have taken me out of dark situations such as the above painters. 'Stuff I like' and can respond to, there's really no irony or overt social commentary. Color is intuitive, coming from my personal surroundings.

Additionally, I have been a huge fan of Eminem since late HS; he's an inspiration, genius and fucking hilarious. Townes' calming, pulse lowering, and his capability of bringing me to the point of tears - not a common feat are his unique attributes to me. Oh, and Danny McBride brings satire to a whole new level. I think of him when I need to step back and laugh at myself.. segue..I read all of Ayn Rand's writings when I was young and impressionable. Only later I learned how she fit into the Republican agenda. Joke's on me.

Although this rule has been broken many times over the decades, traditionally in oil painting the only place where an artist uses words is in the title of the painting-- You turn this on its head by often including your title within the painting as a visual element. Is there a difference when you express your artistic voice in text versus imagery ? Also, in some of the recent paintings such as "100 g's + an attorney"and "Low Standards High Places" the text almost fades away, in this context do you see a tension not between text and pictures, but between pictures and abstraction?

Too many words Dan. The text in the work comes first, title after. Often it starts as the take away of a conversation, warped through rumination and satire, to create a funny phrase or hypothesis of the painting. 99% of the time, the painting is named after this paraphrased premise. It's similar to how a composer might title their work, eg Prelude, Op. 28, No. 4. It's what the piece inherently is and defines its mood. I think in words, not imagery (and I've asked others!) so, of course, it's natural that words would be used in my works.

As I came from a liberal arts background, I do not know the "rules" of taboo painting. How can there be rules if we are to be ourselves? I understand their necessity for a

technical painter perhaps and the need to know the basics to jump off from... but how boring...

I like text in work and dry humor in work, such as Christopher Wool's text pieces. But of course non text artists such as Kirchner really do it for me, his use of color in this situation. A good work is good no matter how it's constructed - though the viewer's opinions are subjective?

My text frequently stems from a response to a real situation whereas the imagery often comes from paraphernalia I've found, catalogs, or still life which I create. The text may be something I'm trying to put behind me while the imagery comes from things I'm that I'm drawn to. The text and imagery don't have to fit, I'm not trying to create a whole narrative here - I'm bringing in the audience here. It's a semi call and response approach.

Having the text fade is not a conscious decision, though I do like abstraction especially AbEx. Perhaps I am focusing on the paint handling more - that's why these paintings are mainly just oil, I was trying to get down to the basics. Looking back at all the work I've ever made is a variation on a theme - myself as the catalyst. Though one can't help - if they paint long enough - to form some sort of style or language. I know I have to change things up to as to not become stagnant and serial. Lastly, thanks so much Dan for making think and stay sane during this shit.