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[Roda Magazine Interviews Megan Euker, A Capoeira Painter](#) ¶

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Written by [Bedirhan Cinar](#) Wednesday, 30 March 2011 19:00



Some of the best parts of training Capoeira is not only learning the moves and singing the songs, but also meeting and working with the awesome people that you train and play with. Capoeiristas tend to be super motivated, fun people that, if anything else, have a lust for life and an uncanny tolerance for pain. Roda Magazine ran into an interesting Capoeirista who's day job is a professional painter and college art professor named [Megan Euker](#). Even more interesting is that a lot of Megan's art works are inspired by Capoeira and she's holding a showing at the Linda Warren Gallery in Chicago on April 15th to show the collection. We sat down with Megan to dive into the lifestyle of an interesting Capoeirista and have an inspiring conversation about training the Art and how Capoeira crossed over into her painting.

Where do you train Capoeira (Location, Group, Teacher, Style)?

I currently train in Chicago with Contra-Mestre Marisa and her group "Gingarte." The group is "CDO/Cordao de Ouro." It's considered Capoeira contemporanea, but would also fall under the style of regional. I have been training with her for going on two years. Before coming to Chicago, I started Capoeira in Italy, where I trained there for a year. In Italy, I trained with Topazio (Regional) under Contra-Mestre Edy (and monitor Elton). I also went to Bahia, Brazil this past summer and trained with a bunch of different groups, both Regional and Angola.

How long have you been training?

About 2.5 years

What do you like best about Capoeira?

I love Capoeira because it is a combination of all of my intense interests: martial arts, music, creative expression, cultural rituals and African dance. But if I were to choose one thing, I suppose my favorite thing about it is the physicality involved in every movement and the fact that it's an incredible challenge no matter what level you are at.

What do you do for a living?

I am a college art professor and a practicing painter/sculptor. Currently I teach at the College of DuPage in Illinois, and I have also taught at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and The Hyde Park Art Center within the past year.

What kind of art do you specialize in?

I have mostly done large, narrative figure paintings. I work in all different kinds of paint (oil, acrylic, flasche, etc.). I have recently included more sculpture and performance into part of my practice.

What's been your most notable art accomplishments so far?

I had a Fulbright Fellowship to Italy, for 9 months, in 2008-9. Also I am represented by Linda Warren Gallery in Chicago where I have had two shows so far, and an upcoming solo show this April.



How has training Capoeira influenced your art?

Well, the obvious influence is that Capoeira has become a subject in my work. I have done paintings of Maculele, Puxada de Rede, the roda, and samba dancers. But I guess the less obvious yet perhaps more important influence is that it has allowed me to approach my paintings in a very similar way that I approach Capoeira ---- I try to paint and sculpt in a way that is very physical and musical. Also, becoming more aware of my own body and how it feels to be in motion and to be in positions that express various gestures really helps me understand the body better in terms of depicting it in painting and sculpture.

How did your fellowship in Italy influence your art?

It led to 2 new and unexpected bodies of work. I went to Italy with the intention of making a series of paintings about people who use natural, outdoor, sulphuric, and sometimes heated baths in Italy for healing purposes. While I did fulfill this intention and while I got to see many amazing baths, I ended up making two series of work which were completely a result of my experience of being in Italy. One series, which I am still working on, is about ironic and conflicted gestures of generosity that I observed in public. The

other unexpected series was the Capoeira paintings.

Aside from influencing the subject matter in my paintings, just the experience of living in a foreign country (including the complications of being a foreigner) and getting away from the everyday distractions of normal life really affected my art.

Did you train Capoeira while you were in Italy?

Yes ----- I first started Capoeira in Italy. In fact, I had never even heard of Capoeira until I was in Florence. I had joined a gym where you could take unlimited classes with a membership. I figured I would try every class, and Capoeira was among one of the classes offered. I fell in love with it right away for many reasons.

Did training in another place influence your Capoeira?

Well, I started training Capoeira in another place, so it's interesting, because still I think in Italian language when I am training since all of my conversations and instruction was in Italian (or some strange combination of Italian and Portuguese) when I started that first year. I have now trained Capoeira in 3 different countries (and 3 different continents) and the great thing is that the language of Capoeira carries across all borders.



We noticed you depict more than regular Capoeira games, but also Makulele and Puxada de Rede in your art. Does the energy of the different types of dances and games influence the painting?

Definitely.....the energy of the movements, the sound of the drums, etc. My favorite subject for painting (in terms of Capoeira) has been puxada de rede.

How is your Portuguese?

I am still definitely a beginner. I have taken 2 or 3 -10 week sessions with my Contra-Mestre and listened to cassettes on my very long commutes to and from work. I speak Italian which helps in some ways but complicates things in other ways. When I was in Brazil, I was completely amazed how tolerant the locals were of my language, and they really encouraged me and wanted me to learn. They didn't even look at me weird even though I was obviously talking in very broken portuguese. I think that sort of tolerance of foreigners is quite rare.

Tell us about the upcoming exhibition in the Linda Warren Gallery in Chicago. What do you hope to express or display the most in the showing?

I guess my evolution of ideas, processes, how I re-visit and re-develop some themes and how one idea leads to another. In terms of Capoeira, I would like to show what it is and let it speak for itself. I am planning on having my group do several performances at the opening reception, and I will have paintings as well as one sculpture about Capoeira.

Some Capoeiristas feel that their Capoeira lifestyle and their professional lifestyle contradict each other a lot; is that the case with you or does Capoeira life mesh well with being an artist?

I would say that Capoeira meshes very well with being an artist. I suppose the only kind of problem I have faced with it is that Capoeira definitely requires a lot of creative and physical energy and time, and I have to balance that with a career that requires the same.



Do you find a lot of similarities with depicting Capoeira in your art with other subjects or past work? Also what are the biggest differences?

A common and repeating theme in a lot of my work is cultural-specific, ritualistic human interaction. This has taken many forms, but Capoeira would fall into this category. Different from some past work, though, I don't always personally know the figures in my Capoeira paintings ---- sometimes I paint the figures because of the actions they are performing or because of the way they activate the canvas. But in a lot of my other work, I often used family members or people I was very close to.

What's the best kind of creative space you need to be in to work on a piece? What puts you in the painting "zone" - do you have a ritual?

I think the best place to be in for me is when I have problems to solve. When I start something and don't get it right, I become obsessed with finding a solution to it. When I feel comfortable and even capable, I guess I get bored or lose excitement. I love process, working in a physical manner, finding problems, getting new ideas during the process, and ending up with something that I didn't anticipate before I started the piece(s). I like to work in long sessions and to not interrupt my momentum ---- (A good cup of coffee

also helps put me in the painting zone too).

Do you prefer Sao Bento Grande, Banguela or Angola games / rodas?

Sao Bento Grande. I like the way Angola looks, but I personally do not like playing Angola.

Any advice you'd like to give to fellow or aspiring artists who train Capoeira or in general?

To never take anything for granted and to always be grateful for what you have.

If you had a million dollars what would you spend your days doing?

Well, if I had a million dollars in general, I would buy my parents a house by the ocean and hope that I could give them money for whatever they wanted. In terms of how my everyday life would change ---- probably not too much. I'm not very materialistic ---- I think I would still like to be part of a university (maybe teaching less, but still involved in the academic world).....I would like to take classes in various sculpture techniques, video editing, etc.....and try other athletics ---- (I would of course still do Capoeira). I would travel more and hope that my family would join me....I guess the big change would be that I wouldn't spend a big chunk of my time worrying about money and applying for tons of grants and additional jobs.

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