



galleryHOUSE

Artists Bios

The Hours of Silence

September 10th to October 6th, 2016

JANA BRIKE

Jana Brike was born in year 1980 in Riga, Latvia, a small country in the North-East of Europe, which was at that time under Soviet occupation.

She has studied academical painting in the Art Academy of Latvia and received M.A. degree in year 2005.

She has exhibited her work internationally in professional venues since 1996 while being still a young teenager, and has had 11 solo exhibitions and nearly 100 other projects and group exhibitions all over the world.

Her main interest is visual art with a strong narrative and depiction of a figure, mostly using the traditional medium of oil painting on canvas, but also drawing, animation, mixed media sculpture, installation and digital art.

Her inspirations for work has been as diverse as: folklore fairytales, children book illustrations, imaginative soviet animation films and supernaturally realistic classical painting; the colorful forbidden rare secret imagery of the western pop culture surrounded by mystical, almost religious tone for the soviet children; the terrifying war and deportation stories that her grandparents, and their little brothers and sister witnessed as small children; pompous alienated eerie atmosphere of the catholic church ceremonies in the Latvian countryside, and the breathtakingly beautiful ballet performances in the opera house, where she was taken since the age of two, as well as others. – all the bitter-sweetness and irreality of the every day.

The main focus of Jana Brike’s art is the internal space and state of a human soul - dreams, longing, love, pain, growing up and self-discovery.

Interview from Buzzworthy.com
Jana Brike – Painting Adolescence To Make Peace With Her Own
“The only thing I can say is: don’t let the ‘downsides’ play a key role on your way to what you truly want to experience in your life”.

Growing up in Latvia, Jana Brike experienced a strict and oppressive early life, an influence that is now seeing her childlike freedom and wildness flourish through her incredible work in adulthood. Her philosophical views on life and learning shine through the moments she shared with us this week.

Q: When did your creative life begin? Has art always been your path? Describe your journey to this point and how art came to be part of your life.
I grew up in a Soviet scientists’ village surrounded by research institutes of physics, chemistry, biology and a nuclear plant. I was very bright with math, science, programming, everything logical, but I was also socially borderline autistic.

I went to a very professional art school when I was about 10. Everything was taught in a very professional language, I didn’t understand half of it. We were just practicing painting and drawing, 5 hours a day for countless years. It was like those schools where they would teach the upcoming Russian realism painters, or later all the artists who would work for Soviet propaganda mechanism.

I did have my big periods of doubt somewhere in between that all. I worked at computers in a publishing house for a while, but never stopped painting whenever I could. And somehow, I came back to doing it full time in the end.

Q: What are the upsides and downsides to the artist’s life?
I really love my life. Yes, I have had a full range of what can be glanced over as “downsides” along my road, starting from survival issues, to putting my trust in dishonest dealers I had to sue to get my money back.

So what? It has led me to a much better, less naïve and way more beautiful place to be.

What is a deadly obstacle to one, can be just a fleeting sign post marking possible paths ahead for another.

The only thing I can say is: don’t let the “downsides” play a key role on your way to what you truly want to experience in your life.

Q: Do you have a mentor or an idol? Which artists inspire you?
I have never had real mentor in the common sense of the word. There have been many people who have given me an opportunity, had faith in me and my work at times when I had lost trust in myself, and it has meant the world and more.
Sometimes I have felt a stronger inspiration and push in the right direction from people who I see are completely NOT what I would ever want to be like.

Q: Do you have an underlying theme that you carry throughout your practice?
By most part I paint playful adolescence: their misadventures and emotional processes, growing pains and initiation into adulthood. I paint what I perceive as the feminine soul space, like a garden with both fresh blossoms and decay. I paint children.

Sometimes I have thought I paint children because I cannot be a child myself. I was raised up in a very restricted environment. To feel guilty and ashamed for just about everything was considered normal. I kept my wildness and craving to live with openhearted immediacy well hidden. I am luring that carefree wild child out to live a full life through my art. I as a person am still in struggle of doing it in my life.

Q: What has been your most significant achievement or proudest moment as an artist?
I have always had issues accepting the achievement and accomplishment driven society of self-importance. One where you climb a ladder craving to show off that you are a generally approved, recognized and established citizen. There will always be someone above you, bigger, better and more significant, and you just climb and climb for new achievements.

So how can I even start to reply to your literal question?
My most significant achievement as an artist has been to get back up on my feet when I have fallen, or keep creating when I have lost trust in my work companions or myself. My proudest moment as an artist has been to keep expressing when my voice is ridiculed, or keep finding, capturing and creating beauty regardless where the world seems to be focused all around.



Q: Have you got any other great passions besides art?
I love plants. I mostly know flowers by their scientific name, and I love to nurture some weird rarities that aren’t even supposed to grow where I live, but somehow survive for me.

One wonderful photographer friend once said I must be sublimating my own personal sense of otherness, of someone who grows in an uncongenial social climate by trying to make these exotic flowers grow for me – if they can blossom and set seed, then I must be capable of it as well. Who knows, maybe he was right.

Q: If you had the power to change one thing, what would it be?
When I was in Thailand, I had my son Adam with me who was 6 at that time. We visited a Buddhist temple where they had a big orange scroll of cloth – people could write down their prayers. Adam wanted to write something. After a while I peeked over his shoulder, and what I read was:

“I wish for humankind to understand”.
He explained – “People don’t really know what life is and who they really are. Everybody is so lost and confused and just arguing about viewpoints. I ask my important questions and nobody knows how to reply – so I wish for humankind to truly understand the replies to their own big questions”.
He’s right you know. This would make the world of a difference.
It was one of most beautiful moments of my life.

Q: What is your greatest dream as an artist?
When I am asked about my dreams and goals, I always remember how I used to play with my sister when we were Soviet children. We would play that we would circle the globe landing in different countries. At that time, being behind a political wall, it was as realistic as if today I would visit the Andromeda galaxy on a Sunday night.
The life I’m living right now is far beyond my greatest childhood dream. So I try not to limit my future within the “greatest dreams” that my brain could master. I just hold in my heart the sense of the experiences I would love to have, and rely on life finding ways and means to carry me there.



TROY BROOKS

From *High Fructose* magazine:

Known for his surrealistic portraits of elongated women with stretched oval faces and simplified features, self taught artist Troy Brooks once joked that, had he gone to art school, it would have “fixed” his work’s most defining characteristic. “One thing that used to drive me crazy was that I always made the faces too long. It was something I used to have to go back and fix in my drawings. When I began creating my own characters I decided to just accentuate it,” Brooks says.

Influenced by classic Hollywood films from the 20s, 30s and 40s particularly, the women that he paints have a timeless glamour about them, lit dramatically to give them a sense of eerie seductiveness and intensified emotion. On why he paints women, Brooks relates the subjects in his oil paintings to his own feelings and expereinces as a gay artist who was bullied as a child for being “like a girl”: “The women in my paintings were confrontational and in charge. They had access to everything I felt was out of reach for me. They faced my fears in cryptic tableaux and conquered,” he says. Their androgyny implies their uncompromised sexual identity, where the woman is creating chaos and embracing it with courage, in Brooks words, “completely visible and not backing down.”

Interview by Rohayl Varind
<http://www.timesofyouth.com/>

Q: For those who don’t know about you and your work, can you tell us a little about yourself?

I was born in Southern Ontario, Canada. My mother was a painter, although not a very good one. She made small watercolor paintings as an afternoon hobby and I was instantly fascinated. I started drawing before I could talk. I was convinced I was born the wrong sex when I was little and I made pictures of powerful, domineering women as a way of resolving feelings of humiliation. I taught myself to paint and never went to art school, which I am grateful for because they would have improved my terrible proportion. I always made my faces too long and they probably would have fixed that.

Q: How would you describe your work to someone who has never known about it?

I am Franz Kafka as a drag queen, spilled onto a canvas.

Q: What sparked your initial interest in arts?

I can’t remember a time that I wasn’t hunched over an image of a woman. But I do remember asking my mother to draw me pictures of Wonder Woman when I was very little. I have vivid memories of laughing out loud as I watched her draw a female figure because I was so thrilled by it. It actually tickled me in my chest and I would burst out laughing. Later on, as a teenager, art became a life saver because it was my only safe form of expression.

Q: At what age did you start doing all this work? Has your family always been supportive of this choice of career?

My family is very supportive, even though my mother is disturbed by the women in my work. They encouraged me to go to art school, but I didn’t. Gauguin said that an artist’s life was “one long martyrdom.” It just seemed like a nightmare to me. But you are what you are and my life was an absolute disaster until I finally focused on the work I was meant to do. I started exhibiting in 2010. My first show “Virago” almost sold out and allowed me to focus entirely on my girls.

Q: If not this, what else would you have taken up as your 2nd career of choice and why?

Music, because it’s not so lonely. It’s immediate and accessible. But that’s why everyone is doing it now and the

industry is saturated with people who are only interested in using it for self advertising.

Q: Do tell us how has your experience been in your current field so far.

It’s been spectacular and incredibly fortunate. I really never thought people would be interested in my girls. The art I make is completely self-indulgent. I don’t do commissions and I never make compromises. And yet, people seem to be interested.

Q: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate yourself as an artist, honestly?

Well, that’s a loaded question! Since you asked for honesty, I guess I can refrain from false modesty. I think I am the best at what I do. If I wasn’t, I would just be doing this as a pastime. So my answer would be 10. Don’t hate me.

Q: Which of your projects are you most proud of and why?

The painting I am probably most proud of is the one called “Daddy”, but I intensely dislike the women who bought it, so it’s safe in assuming that I’ll never lay eyes on it again. I love that piece because it’s a lifetime of a diary in a single image.

Q: Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

I’d like to one day find a fabulous Flash dance loft and maybe mentor some younger artists.

Q: What is one question nobody has ever asked you— that you wish they asked you?

Did Madonna say thank you?

Q: Any message to your fans or followers via Times of Youth?

Anytime anyone responds with enthusiasm to my girls it’s inspiring because these are pieces that I thought I would have to keep buried my whole life. So if I have any message to admirers of my work, it would be a big warm and sincere thank you.

Q: Do tell us how can fans can contact you to share their appreciation/feedback/suggestions.

People can contact me directly through my website www.troybrooks.com

RONNIE BURKETT

Ronnie Burkett, puppeteer, playwright, performer, designer (born at Lethbridge 10 June 1957). Ronnie Burkett is acclaimed around the world for his dazzling theatrical productions featuring marionettes of his own design and creation. His performances have entertained and delighted adult audiences since the 1970s when he began his career with a one-man street theatre show (featuring a “bag stage” that he actually wore) titled *Plight of Polly Pureheart*, which he performed more than 1200 times in schools, community centres, night clubs, malls and on Armed Forces tours.

Education

Burkett spent his formative years in Medicine Hat. At 7 years old, he first read about puppets in the World Book Encyclopedia. Early influences were Bil Baird (featured in the WBE), whose puppets in “The Lonely Goatherd” in *The Sound of Music* set Burkett’s determination to become a puppeteer. He claims his first “real” show was a handpuppet musical titled *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, which he wrote and began touring at age 14. He attended Medicine Hat College for 1 year and was awarded a scholarship as a theatre major to Brigham Young University in Utah. He left after a semester; his training was to be more practical and hands-on than academic or theoretical.

Ronnie Burkett’s chief mentor was Martin Stevens, through whose influence (initially through a correspondence course of puppetry) Burkett would form the basis

for his technique in the areas of marionette construction, writing and vocal work. His significant Canadian mentor was Noreen Young of Ottawa, known for her CBC program of that time, *Hi Diddle Day*.

Early Puppet Theatre

In 1976 Burkett attended an international puppet festival in Moscow, where his early mentor Bil Baird invited him to New York to audition for Baird’s permanent puppet theatre. Burkett joined the company that was to last for only a year and then, still in New York, built many of the puppets for the PBS production of *Cinderabbit*, winning an Emmy Award in 1979. He returned to Alberta in 1980 and founded a TV puppet company doing industrial work, TV commercials and children’s programs. He performed *Polly Pureheart* at the first Edmonton Fringe Festival in 1982.

Theatre of Marionettes

In 1986 he started Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes. The first show was titled *Fool’s Edge* - a naughty commedia dell’arte musical - by Calgarian Blake Brooker of the One Yellow Rabbit Theatre Ensemble. *Fool’s Edge* premiered at Calgary’s Alberta Theatre Projects in 1986 and went on to the Edmonton Fringe, the Winnipeg Fringe, Workshop West (Edmonton), One Yellow Rabbit, Factory Theatre (Toronto) and the duMaurier World Stage (Toronto). Burkett refers to this time as his “bad

boy of puppetry phase.”

His play *Tinka’s New Dress* (Manitoba Theatre Centre, 1994) featured more naturalistic marionettes, through which Burkett began exploring construction, movement and marionette control in more depth. The show toured internationally for eight years and was the basis for his considerable international reputation. *Tinka’s New Dress* is the first play of The Memory Dress Trilogy, and was followed by *Street of Blood* (Manitoba Theatre Centre, 1998) and *Happy* (DuMaurier World Stage, 2006).

Provenance, a play about beauty and the artistic movements of the 20th century, premiered at Edmonton’s Theatre Network in 2003 and toured internationally. This was followed in 2006 by *10 Days on Earth* for Canadian Stage; it is Burkett’s favourite play of his own oeuvre. It depicts a week and a half in the life of a mentally challenged man who doesn’t know his mother has died. The show’s title comes from the 10 days between Burkett’s own birth and adoption when he was “alone on earth.” It also toured internationally. *Billy Twinkle: Requiem for a Golden Boy* followed in 2008, premiering at Edmonton’s Citadel Theatre and touring internationally. *Penny Plain*, set in a rooming house, depicting the last 3 days of civilization, premiered in 2011 at the Citadel Theatre. The 2011/12 Canadian tour of this play marked the 25th anniversary season of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes.





RAY CAESAR

Ray Caesar was born in 1958 in London, UK. At an early age, his family moved to Toronto, Canada, where he currently resides. Caesar's vision resonates with the changing psyche of his figures, reflecting memories of his childhood and experiences in working at the Hospital For Sick Children. Celebrated as the grandfather of digital art. Collected by the Hearst Family; Riccardo Tisci of Givenchy; Madonna; the Bristol Museum, UK & selected by the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, New York & Guggenheim, New York through affiliated auctions. Caesar is also inspired from such masters that include François Boucher, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Antoine Watteau. His haunting imagery is created digitally using 3D modeling software called Maya, mastered while working in digital animation for television and film industries from 1998—2001.

An interview with Ray Caesar and Gallery House's Belinda Chun

Q: Who are your top three inspirations, art or otherwise?

I often answer this question naming the artists I love but if I were to truly think about it I would have to answer that the basis of my inspiration is with Time... the past, the present moment, and the fluidity of the future. The past has to be my first top inspiration, as learning from what has been created before is a part of the fabric

of my mind. I keep struggling to make myself more aware of my own memory and what I think of as a collective memory of all culture. There is the past of Visual Art that for me is wonderful and all that came before “Now” is inspiration.

The present moment is fleeting...full of immediate emotion, reaction and intuition. I have struggled with it in the past and I am slowly learning that the present moment too has its own form of inspiration that continually slips into the past and becomes nostalgia. I can lose myself in the present moment and just let it happen, and that's the source of true inspiration.

The fluidity of the future is a sea of endless possibilities. The possibilities form themselves into probabilities...knowing one can change and re-invent aspects of our own way of thinking. The ability to change for the future is only a moment away. I love the erratic energy of the unknown, to let a hand do something with a pencil before the mind knows what is going to happen...that too is inspiring.

Q: What is your biggest challenge personally as it pertains to making your work?

It's such a slow process that I sometimes find it overwhelming to complete certain pieces. My mind wants to create more quickly but reality keeps me grounded by letting me know it takes time. I also seem to reach a point of difficulty in each and every piece I work on...I have found this to be a repetitive and constant occurrence that began decades ago - I reach the midway point in creating a work, then I lose a bit of faith...or the reality of the work starts to challenge the vague notion of what I thought the work was going to be. I work to overcome this point of difficulty but it sometimes overtakes me and the work ends up being abandoned. It's a huge challenge, but I keep the work in mind or at least in a sketchbook which is like an external memory. I often return to these discarded ideas sometimes years later.

Q: What is the significance of the predominately female figure in your work, the spider like legs or many legs of an octopus? Why do you find yourself drawn to them and why are they a recurring theme in your work?

I used to dress as a girl quite often as a child and teenager, and I believe it became a kind of an alter ego. I used to look at myself in a large ornate wood framed mirror in my parents' bedroom and knew I would one day make pictures of what I saw reflected back to me from the oth-

er side of my mind. I was quite a dangerous little child in many ways as I was growing up in an extremely difficult and violent environment that I call a family of wolves. I carried knives and other sharp objects and at a certain age began to stab anyone who hurt me. I also identified with dogs and their sharp teeth; cats with their sharp nails; and other feral animals, especially nocturnal animals as I began to personify parts of myself as one of them. I love animals dearly and developed empathy for them which grew over the years into the best part of who I am. I believe there was a very acute division between who I was at any particular time and I began to get lost in a deep world of daydreams and paracosms. Years later it was diagnosed as Dissociative Identity Disorder but in my mind it was a way to balance the masculine and feminine and the deep dichotomy of civilized and primitive aspects we all carry within our subconscious mind.

My father was a very difficult and violent man but the only person he was afraid of was my mother, and it is she who represents the Spider in my work. She was ferocious, and in many ways I identified with that aspect of her in order to protect myself. My mother wasn't afraid of anything! She literally had no concept of fear and also no concept of empathy. She was very small and thin, being only five feet tall, so looked somewhat like a child herself. She died in my arms in a hospital, and soon afterwards I had repeated visions and visitations for many years. I still struggle with fits of sleep paralysis and bizarre lucid dreams and I always become aware of when she is about as I can smell her cigarette that was rarely away from her lips. The dreams and visitations lasted so long and were of such intensity that I was literally going to the doctor and telling him I was being haunted or I was going mad... I often ended up in the emergency room when things got too intense. It resulted in years of panic attacks and psychotherapy but at the same time it had this wonderful aspect that enabled me to show my work in a gallery for the very first time, which was something I was afraid to do for close to three decades. In death my mother was relentless until I allowed others to see my work. She is the spider whose web crossed from this world into the next world. She is the feral cat with sharp claws sitting on top of the wardrobe in the attic of my mind. As in life she is dangerous but a protective part of who I am. I choose to neither believe nor disbelieve in what happens when she visits. I just wonder about it and that wonder becomes Art and I suppose I just think of it as her final gift.

The tentacles and twisted limbs are a reflection of

my father who was a victim of crippling child hood arthritis and whose feet were very deformed. I remember as a child in the 1960s, of taking off his shoes and soaking his twisted feet after he came home from work in horrible pain. It was quite a difficult time as the pain also made him very angry and often quite violent. As a child I thought people must be very different under their clothes and that was also a metaphor for being very different in their mind under their skin as though they wore a mask. I used to think my father was a demon and that his feet were hoven... I still believe there is a certain truth to that and it made me aware of the demon and angel that lived in him, and in me, and that lives in each and every one of us.

Q: How has your art contributed to society? Do you think it's important that art gives something to society?

I cannot function if I try to think about my work being anything other than for my own need and pleasure...my work is a form of self indulgence. That being said I do think any creative endeavor is not only good for society but one of the root necessities of society. I believe science and technology sit on the foundation of creative thought and our need to make something new from an emotional thought or concept has always existed. You cannot be creative in science and technology without art as it is the root to visualize the creative image in one's mind. The first cave paintings in Altamira used a tool as the extension of the hand and used pictures to form communication of action and emotion, and to tell a story without words. Words are just sounds that originate from pictures. Our minds think in terms of pictures and we have the ability to visualize a creation before it becomes a reality. That to me is the basis of Art... to see something in the virtual environment of our mind's eye and bring that thought into the real world. Art is a very pure expression of that process, it is an expression of what makes us human in its purest form and is an emotion or a concept made into reality.

Q: What causes artistic blocks? What do you do to solve them?

First, I don't think of them as "artistic blocks" but more as a fundamental part of the creative process. I have learnt to love them when they happen and not fear them as they are an important part of how things are made in one's mind. They teach us patience and to slow down, and I think of them as part of the mystery of what the

piece wants to become. I have learned to adapt and adjust "what I thought was going to be" into "what happens now". The work keeps changing and evolving, and that to me is exciting, as anything can happen and whatever course it takes, it's going to surprise me. The work comes alive and says "No, I don't want this, I want to change" and the piece develops its own voice as it literally speaks to you.

Sometimes it helps to chew through the problem with rationality and thought, and other times it's best to let go of thought and express your intuitive moment by moment action of letting the hand do something first before the minds knows what's happening. Other times it's good to see a block as a turning point where you have the option of taking many roads and must decide on a given direction. Sometimes it's best to do nothing and put the problem away for a while.

One thing for sure is that you must trust your intuition and expand your ability to be intuitive. There has to be a delicate balance of reserve and fearlessness, and of apprehension and action. Sometimes something has to be lost and it can feel like cutting off a limb, whereas other times something needs to be added. Sometimes you have to give up on what you want and go down an unfamiliar road, and that's when I sit up and pay attention as I see the excitement of doing something in a totally new way. I can come back to particular ideas year after year moving them about in a fluid manner until they make a choice to evolve into what they want to be. I think not in terms of days or weeks or months when I create... I think in terms of years, and if a piece want to take its time then who am I to rush it. I remove me...my ego...I see the work with empathy and as an entity in itself from its point of view, and let it evolve and become what it wants to be.

Q: In the past two decades who do you believe has made the biggest impact in the art world, artist, collector, philanthropist or otherwise?

The internet has had a powerful effect and I have personally seen it change my world as an artist. The ability to share images across the digital realm has been a fundamental shift for artist as well as collectors, and has exposed the full range of culture and generations of art that was not very accessible 25 years ago. Now we can all collect art even if that collection is digital. But without content, the internet is nothing! So it still comes down to that person who by whatever means, wants to communicate something in an image or performance or object that will be seen by others. The more people create, the more

other people want to see... the more other people want to see the more other people create. The internet as modern media is a vehicle to propagate that perpetual motion. I love making digital art as it fits the digital realm in which I present it, as more people see my work as a digital expression than seeing it in a gallery.

Q: How important do you think it is for artists to know about art history, and why?

I can't really speak for other artists but for me it's a wonderful part of why I make art. I love the idea that an image can speak an emotion that travels through centuries. To feel the emotion of what the artist felt as he or she created a piece is like hearing the words of a ghost from the past whispering into your very soul. To be able to walk in a museum and face a 300 year old painting, to be astonished and have that work engulf you is profoundly spiritual. It is a direct communication from a ghost that is long dead that makes you feel what it felt when it was alive. When I look at a tiny painting by Antoine Watteau I feel his delicate passion, his pain and sadness, his love and joy... I feel his soul is talking to me and me alone.

Q: What's your process? How do you go about starting a piece and then deciding when it's finished?

First, I sketch and draw in public places where I feel a buzz of energy. I sift through my memories with deft fingertips looking for an emotional chord. At some point I switch to a virtual 3D environment in a software called Maya and what begins is more similar to sculpture rather than painting, it is more like working on a theatrical stage set... and a story begins to unfold. I build and pose my model, add texture and lighting, and view the gradually forming image in many variations from different angles. I hide various items in the 3D environment inside other objects, and add my skin as well as my wife's skin to the virtual dolls I create. In some ways there is a voodoo quality to the life that I breathe into the figures and I think of it as a mystical method. This process becomes an almost subconscious one that is very intuitive and the work tells me when it is done and not the other way around. When I actually print the image onto paper, I finally get a sense that I have taken that thing which began as a feeling or emotion and see it become part of reality.

The final result is a print using ink on paper. As I look back through my life, ink and paper have played a great part of who I am, and when I combine those ingredients with thought, memory and emotion they all seem to come together. As a child I had a huge newspa-

per route and delivered hundreds of newspapers daily to peoples' homes. I was constantly covered in ink over my skin and clothes, so much that I could never really wash it off. My bed sheets were also covered in ink. As an escape, I found refuge in books of paper and ink... books with stories and beautiful pictures that became windows into another world... a paracosm that I began to build in my mind. I made pictures with paper and ink so that I can build windows into my very soul, and from that place I found more raw materials in which to make more pictures.

Q: French Fries or Beet Salad with Feta Cheese?

Ha, the Beet Salad for sure... French Fries aren't even an option. I eat one or two just to judge quality and flavour to give my culinary opinion but I exist only because of good healthy food which provides my fuel and vital energy. Give me an avocado, some olive oil and a vine ripened tomato with a pinch of sea salt and pepper... a few garden herbs and a glass of red wine, let's say a Shiraz and I will show you a piece of Heaven. No deep fried potato in saturated fat would stand a chance!

Q: What would you like to be remembered for?

Being one a few people born in the 1950s who miraculously managed to live into the 22nd century when they eventually solved the problem of death, hair loss and weight management. I would walk (or hover in antigravity boots) down the street and people would say "That guy actually lived in the 20th century!". I would be on a lot of talk shows and smash a lot of champagne bottles over newly commissioned starships... that's what I would love to be remembered for.

Q: If an artist could do your portrait which who would it be?

Frank Auerbach

Q: Who would you love to have tea with?

Audry Hepburn

Q: Favorite movie of all time?

Persuasion, 1995, based on the Jane Austen novel with Ciaran Hinds and Amanda Root. I have watched this movie close to 40 or 50 times and I have loved it as much as the first time I saw it.

Q: What is the misconception that people have of you?

I think they are generally under the misconception that I believe they exist...I don't actually believe anyone else exists but I just "wonder" whether they exist or not. In other words, I am just unsure of their existence. I am giving great weight to the theory that everyone and everything might be a figment of my imagination and I might be a floating consciousness, all alone in a non-universe of non-existence, and all this thing called "existence" is just me whistling in the dark pretending someone else is there. There is also the ironic possibility that these other people are under the misconception that I exist when it's quite reasonable that I am merely a figment of their imagination. Perhaps I only think that I exist when in actuality I don't. I hope they don't take it personally though as I hate hurting anyone's feelings even if they or I don't exist!

Q: What do you have for breakfast?

I usually start with an atrocious amount of fiber with Greek yogurt and blueberries, then avocado on whole grain toast, then I have a very tiny amount...two small bites...of a fresh baked apple cinnamon muffin with a huge mug of black coffee.

Q: What is the first thing you thought about this morning?

Why isn't the sun up yet and how pretty the world looks when it's foggy and that I better get my dog outside before we have a repeat of the fiasco of the morning before and why is that lady standing in the corner with light coming out of the top side of her head.

Q: What is the best part of living in Toronto, Canada?

That there is actually an end to winter.



ELIF VAROL ERGEN

Elif Varol Erogen is a Turkish visual artist and instructor at Graphic Design Department. She holds a degree in illustration and graphic design from the Hacettepe University Fine Arts . She started to research about both traditional and underground Japanese art and culture besides Japanese language early years of her career. She had master degree with thesis about history and development of Manga comics in Japanese culture. Journey to Japan for an exhibition gave her new inspirations and changed her artistic approach. After started to work as lecturer at university she completed her Phd Thesis about abstract illustrations both in Belgium at Gent Fine Arts Academy and Hacettepe University Fine Arts.

Her art mainly focused on parent-child relationship, sex discrimination, morbid psychology and narcissism. The characters in her works can be outlined as uncanny, spooky and strange existence with pale faces, sharp teeth and shadows. The heavy dose, grotesque in the images, severe form deformations, sagging and melting forms merge and blend with intensive contrasts in red and black. While the fragility and the repressiveness of the content could ease the audiences empathy, memories of the viewers maintain their dialogues with the works even after this experience. She usually combines digital and traditional media, uses techniques such as acrylic, ink, silkscreening, digital imaging and CNC-machined productions for installations.

SONYA FU

“Art is a powerful visual language and creating art is a calming and therapeutic process. I would like to share with people my dreamscape, its beauty and its oddity. It might be an eerie creature, a whimsical scenery or a disturbed beauty who speaks words of wisdom - they are all embodiments of my subconscious mind. If my work manages to stir emotions and provoke thoughts, then I am doing the right thing as an artist - creating and conveying emotion.”

FU Man Yi (a.k.a. Sonya FU, b.1982) is a visual artist from Hong Kong. Growing up in the former British Colony where East meets West, Fu is influenced by both Oriental and Western culture.

Starting from 2010, Fu has exhibited in many art galleries and international art fairs around the world. Fu’s work has been featured in many art publications including *Curry*, *Beautiful Bizarre* Magazine and the Semi-Permanent art books.

In 2011, Fu was endorsed by Semi-Permanent Hong Kong as a notable and emerging artist. In the same year, Fu was awarded with *Perspective* Magazine’s ‘40 Under 40’ which celebrates top young creative talent throughout Asia.

Interview from Laminate Most Wanted Vol. 3

Q: How did you first get interested in art and how old were you then?

I was around three or four, when I saw my classmate

showing off her princess drawing to the class. I thought to myself, “I would have different approach to the princess.” Then I went home, picked up my pencil and started to draw and explore. My parents were amused by my sudden interest into drawing. Since then, drawing has become my biggest passion.

Q: The characters you draw often look fragile and childlike - what is the inspiration behind them?

I get really emotional when I paint, sometimes I have the feeling that the characters I draw, they live inside me and they feed off my emotion. Perhaps I get too carried away, I have even seen them in my dreams for a few times. They talked to me as if they truly existed, their skin was delicate and their voices were childlike. My work is heavily inspired by dreams and things that happen around me. It is also a reflection of the inner world that exists inside me.

Q: Who and what currently influences you?

I’m inspired by the very atmospheric paintings from the Renaissance period especially Leonardo Da Vinci’s, I love that Sfumato technique that he used in his paintings. The atmosphere is so strong that it sends chill down my spine. I like also the beautiful work by H.R. Giger, Mark Ryden and Amano Yoshitaka.

Q: You’ve recently started working with Aum Brand who print your designs on their apparel. Are you enjoying this foray into fashion?

It’s my first time ever working with a fashion brand, I’m lucky that it’s Aum Brand whom I’m working with. The founder of Aum Brand Amar Stewart is also an artist, he understands how to work with artists and he has a very strong aesthetic sense of combining art with fashion. It’s thrilled to see that people love my work and want to wear it around.

Q: What does your creative process look like?

The majority of my work is painted digitally, so I pretty much paint everything on my computer using a drawing tablet. My work is heavily inspired by my dreams, so when I wake up from an inspiring dream in the middle of the night, I would get up and write down the idea. It always takes me long to be able to fall back asleep and this comes the interesting part. All kinds of crazy and weird vision would hit me as I try to fall asleep at this point. Perhaps that’s why I’m prone to wake up to sleep paralysis and unexplainable hallucinations where I see, hear and feel many unearthly beings. They could be really scary but these dreams/experiences have become my biggest source of inspiration that sometimes, I would induce the experience on purpose just to be able to see these unearthly beauties. I like to integrate these elements

into my work, not necessarily has to be a solid figure that I see, but more symbolic like the atmosphere and emotion that embraces me at time.

Q: What are your plans for this year?

I’m currently working on 3 upcoming group shows and I am planning to collaborate with other artists on an art project which I can’t say anything to the public yet. But stay tuned!





RYAN HESHKA

Ryan Heshka was born in Manitoba, Canada, and grew up in Winnipeg. Fueled by long prairie winters, he spent a lot of his childhood drawing, building cardboard cities and making super 8 films. Early influences that persist to this day include antiquated comics and pulp magazines, natural history, graphic design and music, movies and animation. Formally trained in interior design, he is self-taught as an artist. His illustrations (represented by Kate Larkworthy) has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Playboy*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Esquire*, the *New York Times*, *Smart Money*, and on the cover and interiors of *BLAB!*. He has been selected to appear in American Illustration, Society of Illustrators, and Communication Arts. In addition to gallery shows across North America and Europe, he is currently working on picture book projects for children as well as adults. He lives in Vancouver, B.C., Canada with his wife Marinda and cat Louis.

Things That Inspire Me
by Ryan Heshka

COMICS

For anyone who has seen my work, this will come as no surprise. I have loved the art of the comic book as far back as I can remember. Recently on a trip home, I found a box containing all the comic books I made as a kid, and it reinforced to me that my core as an artist is still with comics. Early on I discovered the greats like Jack Kirby,

Kurtzman, Wolverton, as well as the newspaper comic creators like Chester Gould and E.C. Segar, and my love for their work has never wavered. There is nothing close to those early days, the Big Bang of comic books, when there was no model and all that existed was experimentation and chaos. Although I am not a comic artist myself, I draw on the raw and surreal quality of those old strips, and the kinetic power in those strokes of ink.

TYPOGRAPHY

I can't get enough. I'm a type junkie. I am constantly on the hunt for beautiful typography from all ages and regions, and incorporate type into my work whenever possible. My own use of type falls into two categories: clippings and hand created. The clippings are a result of hours of searching through old magazines, looking for perfect, minuscule pieces of type to either fit into a painting, or to build a painting around. Hand-created type involves painted titles, which are integrated into my artwork, often to achieve the appearance of a fake magazine or pulp cover. Visiting a new city or country is always a rush, discovering old signage and regional styles. I'd say half the photos I take on trips are of typography.

ELECTRONICA

Electronic music drives a lot of my painting and creativity these days. I'm no music theorist, but to me it feels very much like old jazz – wild, free-form, underground, expressive. The shapes of the sounds are very visual to me, and serve as soundtracks while I paint and come up with ideas. I'm not just referring to modern electronica, but early electronic music dating back to the theremin [instrument], and the great sci-fi movie soundtracks of the 1950s. Garage band has allowed me to indulge in creating electronic noises, custom soundtracks for my art – I hesitate to call it music. But it is an extension of my visual work, and its therapeutic to create away from the drawing board once in a while.

STUDENTS

I began teaching a few illustration classes this year at a local art and design university, partly to get out of the house more, and partly to push myself to try new directions. I didn't know what to expect, and speaking in front of a group is not my forte. But as I relaxed into it, I found that communication with the students forced me to really think about my own process, which opened up new ways of thinking. As well, being around students keeps me looking at fresh work, exchanging ideas and

inspiration with unjaded, enthusiastic art nerds. It's a challenge that gives back as much as I can put into it.

B-MOVIES

Like comics, I have always been enthralled with old B-grade movies. The best of them ooze with childlike enthusiasm; the worst are entertaining on an unintentional level. My favourites exhibit horror and humour simultaneously. The speed at which these movies were made somehow translates as raw energy on the screen, and any fakeness is compensated by spontaneity. Sure, I like Hitchcock and Orson Welles, but watching the work of an early exploitation auteur like Dwain Esper (*Narcotic* or *Maniac*) is much more visceral. The texture of a rubber monster or stop-motion gore can't be duplicated by the slickness of CGI. In addition to the films themselves, the posters of many B-movies are pieces of art that have become classic, iconic imagery (*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*).

NATURE

Specifically, creepy nature. As a kid, I loved summer. Not for baseball, or for camping trips, but because I could get a jar of pond water and spend hours examining it under a microscope. I could dig up the garden and find a multitude of pale, alien life forms. Winter on the prairies of Canada offered its own sort of dark, weird solitude. Trees covered entirely in frost. Strange icicle formations. The Aurora Borealis. Our parents always encouraged us to appreciate the beauty of nature, but somehow I managed to find nature's underworld on my own. It was this exploration of nature's shadows that continues to find its way into my work.

JESSICA JOSLIN

The New Contemporary Art Magazine
An Interview with Jessica Joslin by J.L. Schnabel
by JL SchnabelPosted on April 21, 2011

Jessica Joslin is the creatrix of a curious menagerie of hybrid creatures, composed of a varied anatomy of bone, glass, leather and metal, meticulously assembled to look like real specimens. Her work recalls a sense of the Victorian era’s obsession with detail and death and yet retains a playfulness attributed to circus shows of trained animals performing gravity defying feats. *Hi-Fructose* was recently able to interview the artist, take a look at her intriguing responses below.

Q: Can you pinpoint the moment you decided you wanted to become an artist? What was your childhood like?

I’m not sure when I decided to become an artist, but when I was a little girl, I wanted to be a sailor. I didn’t actually know any sailors, so my idea of what that might actually entail was pretty skewed. I pictured it as somewhere in-between deep sea diving with Jacques Cousteau and observing epic battles between giant squids and sperm whales from the crow’s nest of a clipper. I grew up in Boston, where everything has a patina and encourages fantasies about the past, especially maritime fantasies. When I finally discovered that to realize my sailor dream, I’d have to be a man 300 years ago, I decided that I would

be a biologist instead. The desire to make sculptures didn’t come until much later, science was my first great love. I was a nerdy kid, always content with my nose buried in a book and always wanting to learn obscure details about what I saw around me. That tendency dovetailed perfectly with the sensibility of the grand old museums in the area, which were Wunderkammers and havens of taxonomy. At the natural history museums at Harvard, with their Victorian-era passion for collecting and labeling, I discovered the animal kingdom...magnificent, inscrutable, magical and...dead. The taxidermy animals that I saw were far more fascinating than any animals that I could see in “real life.” In fact, I couldn’t see wild animals at all. I was extremely near-sighted, but didn’t realize it for years. I assumed that everyone saw like I did- and as long as I could read my books, there was no problem. Anyway, my early passion for collecting was spurred by those museums, and in part, my fascination with taxidermy specimens was because I could actually see them. I didn’t understand the excitement of seeing a bird flying through the sky, not until many years later. At home, we started our own cabinet of curiosities, beginning with exotic seedpods from the Arnold Arboretum, and shells, bones and crab claws found at the beach. It grew to include a huge variety of natural objects, and it turned our family vacations into one big treasure hunt. To this day, when I’m walking through the woods, my eyes are always on the ground, searching for treasures and from time to time, I still flitch treasures from the family nature collection to use in my sculptures...

Q: What is it about the circus, particularly circus freaks that attracts you? Your work echoes highly sophisticated gaffs for a modern circus and I feel that if you had been born in an earlier era, you would have been highly sought after in the circus set.

Making gaffs for a gilded-age circus sideshow? Oh, I’d love to have that job! ;) My piece Phineas was actually named after good ‘ol P.T. Barnum. It’s a riff on Barnum’s infamous humbug, the Fiji Mermaid, one of his most popular attractions. At the time, it was promoted as a “real mermaid” but was actually a monkey torso spliced onto a fish’s tail by some clever taxidermist. My version is also a monkey with a fish tail, but the tail is made from the ornate spout of a teapot. He has tiny shell ears, silver wings, an intricate silver ribcage/corset and deep brown eyes. I think the lure of the circus is that it’s a world that exists solely to ignite dreams. It’s ornate and wonderful and ridiculous and full of mystery and whimsy, designed

to surprise and delight. I should note that I’m not thinking of the tawdry spectacles of today, but of the past. I’d give almost anything to have been able to visit Barnum’s American Museum, which was in NYC from 1841-65. For me, that was when the real magic was happening, the true golden age of the circus. It was a delicious cocktail of sensationalist attractions like the Fiji mermaid, General Tom Thumb and Chang & Eng, alongside a live menagerie and aquarium, displays of natural curiosities, dioramas, taxidermy and wax figures...there was even a theater and lecture hall! For me, that sounds like a combination that can’t be beat, especially when you figure in the fringe-trimmed velvet curtains, dark hardwood fixtures, jaunty brass bands and vivid sideshow banners.



Q: I’ve read that you have an education on anatomy and biology. When working with bone and skin, it is with the eye of the scientist or the artist ?

Actually, when it comes to animal anatomy, I’m purely an autodidact. Of course, that doesn’t mean that I haven’t done my homework, so to speak! ;) In terms of the work that I do, it’s a finely calibrated trinity of considerations: aesthetic, engineering and anatomical. In terms of the anatomical, yes, with each piece I am referencing specific structures, and usually from the species that I am depicting (although there are exceptions.) However, those bodily structures are often tweaked to compensate for other considerations. Most people don’t notice that, because the overall feel is right. For example, almost all of my creatures have only 3 toes, not 4 or 5. I figure that since it’s my world, I get to make the rules, and I don’t want to spend too much time doing repetitive work. If 3 toes can get the idea of a foot across, and it looks right, then why include more? 3 toes is also better from an engineering standpoint. Since the contact/balance points are along the edges of the feet, more toes wouldn’t necessarily mean more stability. Also, more generally speaking, in my work, I’m always representing interior and exterior anatomy simultaneously. One line of a form might delineate the belly and another, the ribcage. Of course, you wouldn’t typically see both at the same time, so it creates a sort of double vision between the skeletal anatomy and the structure of the living animal. That’s one of the reasons that my work might seem “alive” although it’s mainly based on skeletal forms. It’s not just a skeleton with eyeballs. The lines of the metalwork also suggest the volume of the flesh. I think that mostly seeps in on a subconscious level, but there’s an instinctive response. I don’t think that people would feel such an emotional pull if it was only a skeleton.

Q: Can you describe what an average working day for you is like? Do you work on many creatures at once or one at a time?

No two days are the same- that’s one of the things that I love best about this job! Yes, I usually switch off between several pieces. Since I work with found objects, I’ll sometimes need to set a piece aside until I can find the right size of, say, antique Model-T car horn. That can sometimes take awhile! Also, Jared’s easel is just a few feet away from where I work, so some things need to happen while he’s away. For example, you would not believe the racket when I cut apart musical instruments. They conduct sound so well that you can literally hear it from

blocks away. I try to time these things well. I don’t do metal grinding at 3am anymore. I’m lucky that none of the neighbors have called the cops on me...yet. I usually try to spend time each day alternating between planning, working, ordering materials, and doing various other stuff, like shooting and retouching pictures, interviews, etc. I’m a night owl, so during the day, I might do engineering drawings of leg configurations, order eyeballs for upcoming projects, or visit the charmingly grumpy old men at my favorite hardware, lamp, or antique shops. At night is usually when I settle down at my workbench and play with my toys, that’s when the real magic happens.

Q: Your work seems to be steeped in both the modern ‘steam-punk’ movement/aesthetic and the antiquity and obsessions of the Victorian era. Can you discuss how these two thematic movements/time periods may inform your work?

I absolutely love the Victorian tendency to put fligree on everything, their predilection for miniturization, and the integrity of the craftsmanship. There was a sense of honor in honing one’s craft to a fine point, over the course of many years, and in constructing things with intense precision. When I see the tools that things were built with, I am even more flabbergasted at what was achieved. There was also a fascinating sense of adventurousness when it came to engineering, a desire to create things that had never been done before and to make them bigger, better, MORE... Of course, we still have that, but on a different level. Making a bigger Big Mac isn’t the same sensibility as the one that created the Crystal Palace at the World’s Fair of 1851.

Most aesthetic aspects of the “modern Steampunk movement” don’t seem to capture what I feel is at its heart. The worlds dreamt up by literary figures like HG Wells and Jules Verne are articulated with the extravagant exactitude of the Victorian era, but Steampunk brings us a world that uses spray-painted plastic in lieu of hand engraved brass. At first glance, it can be enticing, but once you scratch the surface, it’s disappointingly flimsy. As applied to my work, it sometimes makes me wonder if people can tell the difference between metalwork and mylar...

Q: It seems that there has been a surge of interest in taxidermy, antique collecting, and art made with bones. Why do you think now is the time these oddities are surfacing in our culture? How do you see your work fitting into this?

When I began making this sort of work, it was certainly a different landscape in terms of interest in such things. At the time, I was very much the oddball for working with bones and antique parts. Unless you were a conceptual artist, assemblage sculpture and taxidermy art (with the exception of Surrealist-era artists) was mostly seen as the domain of hillbilly hobbyists. (Then again, that was back in the dark ages before civilians had computers, so it was much harder to gauge what was happening outside of the mainstream.) In some ways, I don’t think that there has been a surge of interest. It’s just that whatever you might fancy, it’s much easier to find it nowadays.I think that assemblage art often appeals to young artists because it seems like neat shortcut around the hard work of actually learning how to make things. That’s especially the case with bones. They’re inherently beautiful as sculptural objects, and loaded with symbolism, so it’s easy to take a skull and some pretty antique gee-gaws, stick them in an old wood box, and call it art. It looks interesting and requires minimal effort. It’s a similar scenario with a lot of taxidermy art nowadays. It’s (almost) a ready-made art piece. Just buy some old taxidermy and cut it up or hot-glue stuff onto it...and voilà! Not to say that there isn’t great work being done nowadays in those categories, quite the contrary! There is some truly brilliant work being done by my contemporaries. It’s an exciting time to be an artist because it’s that much easier to discover and connect with people who are out there making wonderful things. In terms of contemporary sculptors working specifically with taxidermy, bones, and/or assemblage, some of my favorites are: Lee Bontecou, Tessa Farmer, Les Deux Garcons, This Must be Designed by Idiots (aka. Afke Golsteijn & Floris Bakker), Polly Morgan, Jan Fabre, Kris Kuksi, Sarina Brewer, Andy Paiko, Ron Pippin and Maurizio Cattelan. I don’t know whether I could pinpoint exactly where I fit into the big picture, but I feel that these artists are kindred spirits in one way or another.

Q: Where do you imagine is the ideal home for your creatures while you are making each piece?

One where it will be well-loved, appreciated, and always kept out of the reach of curious house pets.

Q: How important is the ritual act of collecting the objects you use in each piece to your work? Do special, rare finds imbue a private sentimentality to the piece? When you set out seeking, are there certain things you look for or is it more spontaneous?

Everything is better when it has a great back-story! If a

bird’s toes are made from knife rests that I found in an odd little shop owned by a lady with an electronic voice synthesizer, I think it it adds a bit of charm. I don’t have any official way of conveying that information, although it seems to come up a lot when I’m talking to people at openings. I’m always on the lookout for materials, wherever I am, whatever I’m doing. In that way, my sculptures are sort of like a semi-secret scrapbook, with trinkets from all sorts of places, people and time peroids...a grab bag of memories.There is a strange intimacy in working with bones, and there are often tangible tales about the animal’s life embedded within. I know whether it died young or old, if it had arthritis or parasites, if it had broken a bone and if so, how long ago and whether it would limped. It might have bits of schrapnel embedded, with the bone grown up around it like a pearl- that tells me that it had a run-in with a hunter and survived. Fellini once said “The pearl is the oyster’s autobiography.” If you know how to read them, bones are an animal’s autobiography.There are a LOT of things that I look for when I’m collecting materials. Some of the things that draw me to a particular part are probably obvious, like a beautiful patina. Other aspects, like the need for objects to be bilaterally symmetrical, might not. At this point, I’ve been adding to my bag of tricks (ie. specific techniques and/or ways of making things) for quite awhile, so at any given moment, there are literally hundreds of specific objects that I’m always on the lookout for. However, what I find at any given moment definitely influences what I’ll make next. For example, I just found a lovely Victorian silver cutwork bon-bon tray. From the moment I saw it, I knew that it was destined to become a fanciful ruff for a pufferfish, and that the pattern would lend itself to an intricate configuration of fins. What can I say? My work has re-wired my brain so that I can’t help looking at antiques like the artist/engineer/mad scientist that I am.

Q: What objects are in your personal collection that you can’t part with in your sculptures?

I used to think there was a line, but then I cut apart my favorite antique silver vase because Otis needed a fancy headpiece. Now all bets are off...

Q: How does sharing a studio with your painter husband (Jared Joslin) affect your working landscape? Do you feel that you each inspire the other?

Absolutely! It’s sort of like playing psychic ping pong, there’s a constant back and forth of ideas, suggestions

and general goofiness that goes on. He knows my work better than anyone, and he’s the one who I always turn to for a second opinion. It’s easy to get locked into a particular way of thinking about what you’re making, and it’s a wonderful luxury to have someone to bounce ideas around with and make suggestions. It’s also a major bonus that he’s very knowledgeable about animals and anatomy, having painted an impressive array of species over the years. Sometimes he’ll peek over my shoulder and misinterpret what I’m doing in a way that shifts my vision. For example, I’ll be holding a piece upside down while I’m working, and he’ll see that the curve of it’s spine might be more interesting if it was reversed. He might suggest a change in pose, like shifting the weight onto one hip so that the stance looks more naturalistic, or maybe putting it into a crouch, rather than just standing there. I even ask for advice on “simple” things like whether a femur looks proportionately too long or too short. It saves a lot of time, having a second pair of eyes on things now and then. I also find that creatures occasionally migrate from one of us to the other. If he’s painting a whippet in a fringed collar, or a falcon in a fancy hood, I have those at the front of my mind and sometimes I’ll need to do my own version of them. Fortunately, what we do is very different, so that may not even be evident to most people...

Q: What do you consider to be the true heart of your work?
Love.

Q: By using bone paired so closely with metal, do you imagine that if these creatures were to be imbued with life, that their instincts would be more primal or more robotic?
I imagine that their demeanor would be somewhere in-between that of a real animal and an automaton. I enjoy picturing them scampering around, exploring and frolicing, just as soon as the humans go to sleep. That sense of play is important. I’m also fascinated with the idea of an exquisite artificial creature: the nightingale in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale, or the clockwork concubine who dances in Fellini’s Casanova. In a lot of ways, I’m like Geppetto, making creatures that may dream of becoming real animals.

Q: What’s on the horizon for you?
I’m in a show this month at Lisa Sette Gallery in Arizona. I have a show this May, at Wexler Gallery in Philly and

Roq la Rue Gallery in Seattle in December, and this fall at La Luz de Jesus and the FSU Art Museum. I also have a brand spankin’ new website, which I’m thrilled to bits about and YOU are the VERY FIRST ONES to know about it!!! To see more of my creatures, visit <http://www.jessicajoslin.com>.

HEIKO MÜLLER

My art comes from an urge to explore. I like the countryside. I like a good view. And once I’m face to face with a lovely scenery, I feel immediately tempted to find out what it’s concealing. The dark goings-on behind the façade of nature, you might say, or the hidden machinations of the animal kingdom.

To imagine and express this, I usually tap the lines linking religious icon art, renaissance painting and comic culture. I am particularly thrilled by the kind of spiritual terror you find expressed in the paintings of the old Flemish masters, and I’m trying to find out what happens when you apply that mood to the serene and harmless world of rural folk art.

I am based in Hamburg, Germany, but my stuff has also been shown in such diverse places as Estonia, New York, Paris, Saint Petersburg, Los Angeles, Seattle and Chicago. When not busy with art or media work, I can usually be found painting pictures with my two little sons.

Interview from WowXWow magazine

Heiko Müller – Painting Nature’s Façade – Artist
Interview posted in: Artist Interviews, Interview Archives

Heiko Müller doesn’t like to think about categories. He makes the art he wants to and uses the techniques that best suit his needs. In doing so, his work soars free of categorisation in both subject and approach. Müller’s art comes from an urge to explore. He has a deep love for the great outdoors and is on a constant mission to reveal

the dark activities that take place behind the façade of nature. His landscapes are often the dwelling places of fantastical creatures and brightly coloured floating dots, all of which evoke feelings of curiosity and unease. Heiko wields an extensive armoury of mark making knowledge which he skillfully employs alongside his vivid imagination to create images filled with expressive raw power. Müller was born in 1968 in Hamburg, Germany, where he still lives and works. His art has been exhibited internationally for many years and resides in private collections around the world.

WOW x WOW caught up with Heiko and asked him a few questions about his career as an artist.

Q: Can you tell us a little about where you live?

I live in a small town close to Hamburg in the North of Germany. I only have to walk a short way down the road to reach a forest with a number of lakes. I try to make this my jogging track once or twice a week and when I do, I sometimes see roe deer. My son Leo once discovered big antlers. Sometimes you can spot rare birds and in the summer there are myriads of tiny frogs. I grew up in the city and had to make a day trip to take a walk in a forest like this one. That didn't happen too often, so I really appreciate having such a place nearby.

Q: An obvious love of nature and the outdoors inspires much of your art, but what inspires the surreal elements that appear throughout your work?

When I was a kid I had to share a bedroom with my brother, who is ten years older. He pinned a big poster on our wall. It was Dali's 'Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man.' The painting fascinated me and so I got infected by Surrealism so to speak. I'm not such a big fan of classic Surrealism anymore, but I still love novels, comics and movies with surreal elements. The comic book artists that I find most influential are Daniel Clowes and Charles Burns. I read their books regularly. What I like most about them is that they always radiate a great sense of calm, regardless of how bizarre they may get. When it comes to movies, I prefer the classic directors: Fritz Lang, Luis Buñuel and Alfred Hitchcock. As far as novels go, I love those of Haruki Murakami, David Mitchell and Gabriel Garcia Márquez, just to mention a few.

Q: Your paintings traverse a wide range of mark making, going from softly blended areas to very

loose and expressive brush strokes. Sometimes these variations occur within the same painting, but more often you stick to one of these styles for a specific piece. How do you go about choosing which painting technique will suit a particular image?

I love to work in both styles, but to work in the more loose and expressive technique is a little bit more exciting for me. The only problem is, that when I start with such a painting, I'm not sure where the journey is going. Those paintings look like they were made rather quickly, but in actual fact, quite often I have worked on those longer than on the more realistic pictures. During the last few years, I was in a steady state of being behind in my schedule, that's why I've made more realist pieces. Don't get me wrong, I love to paint realistic too and it is still very interesting for me to try to increase my technique.



Q: You have exhibited your art on New Contemporary/Pop Surrealist scene for many years now and your drawings and paintings have been exhibited in galleries all over the world. What is the New Contemporary art scene like in Germany and what are your hopes for its future?

About 10 years ago, I became a member of the Art Dorks Collective, which was founded by one of my favourite artists, Brendan Danielsson. I think the group was made up of 22 artists from the US at that time, plus me. They organized group shows for us in Sacramento, LA and New York and so I asked the gallery Feinkunst Krüger if they would be interested in doing a similar thing here in Hamburg. They accepted and for 9 years

now, we have been putting on this group show every year during December. From the very first exhibition in 2006, the gallery and I decided to curate the show with a mix of Art Dorks, some other artists we like from the US, plus some European artists who are related to Lowbrow and Pop Surrealism. Throughout the 8 exhibitions we've had so far, we've shown about 100 artists including Ron English, Gary Baseman, Femke Hiemstra and Travis Louie, just to name a few. The show has received so many fans and there are quite a number of people in Hamburg who refer to this show as 'the art highlight of the year.' That's also why I'm puzzled that almost all the other galleries in Germany who were specialising in showing Lowbrow/Pop Surrealism closed during the last few years. And not only those. Also my favourite galleries for Street Art and Urban Art closed or decided to make a break for an undefined time. Even though there would be stiffer competition for us, I would prefer to have more galleries here who show the type of art that I like the most.

Q: What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?

When I was a student I was a big fan of Fred Stonehouse's work. In 2007 we both took part at a charity show which was curated by Gary Baseman and I actually got a very nice email from him saying that he liked my painting. Later that year we met in Berlin and it was really great. We swapped paintings and talked about showing together. One year later we did a small group show together with Femke Hiemstra and Anthony Pontius and in 2010, Fred, Femke and I did another group show together. Fred and Femke visited us in Hamburg to attend the opening and even though I have had some nice solo shows since, I would still say that the group shows with Fred and Femke are the highlights of my art career. I really love their art, but more important is that we became friends. The exhibitions were quite successful for all of us and so it was really nice to enjoy those experiences together.

Q: What's next for Heiko Müller?

I just had my biggest solo show so far, on which I worked for the last 18 months, but there is no time for a rest, as in November there will be the opening of 'Don't Wake Daddy IX', an annual Lowbrow group show which – as I mentioned above – I've been curating, together with the Feinkunst Krüger gallery, for the last 9 years. Then the Jack Fischer Gallery from San Francisco will show my stuff at a side fair of Art Basel Miami in

December. Next year I'll have shows in Portland and San Francisco, both in May.

ARON WISENFELD

Aron Wiesenfeld's artwork has been the subject of eight solo exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe since 2006. Among the many publications his work has appeared in are *Hi-Fructose*, *Art In America*, and *The Huffington Post*. His work has been in numerous museum shows, including The Long Beach Museum of Art, Bakersfield Museum of Art, and The Museum Casa Dell'Architettura in Italy. His paintings have been used on covers of 8 books of poetry, including *The Other Sky*, a collaborative book project with poet Bruce Bond. In 2014 a large monograph of his work titled *The Well* was published by IDW Press.

Exclusive Interview: Behind the Scenes of Aron Wiesenfeld's "Solstice" at Arcadia Contemporary
by Nathan SpoorPosted on September 16, 2014

Beautifully-rendered and atmospheric, Aron Wiesenfeld's latest body of paintings reminds us how adept the artist is at creating scenes of suspenseful distinction. With the precedent of following the artist's work set in *Hi-Fructose* Vol.14, Vol. 22 and online, we were invited into his studio to gaze into Wiesenfeld's progressively mysterious world. His latest suite of paintings, titled "Solstice" will be shown at Arcadia Contemporary in NYC from September 18 through October 3.

In these new paintings, Wiesenfeld created in a somewhat different manner, allowing the environments to have the primary importance before adding any charac-

ters to the scene. Created in his San Diego, CA studio, these new works concentrate on the fragile state of mortality. The artist is mindful of death, with the awareness that one can be reborn into the cycle of life – the evolving symbol of a migrating soul. With words scarcely able to do the work justice, we recommend viewers see the paintings in person or check out Wiesenfeld's latest book, *The Well*.

Aron Wiesenfeld in his studio.

Q: It's wonderful to see these new paintings, which appear to be paintings focused on seasons, change and some migratory event. It seems that there is some sort of a shift in this body of work from your previous shows in some ways, is that fair to say?
Thanks a lot! There were some things I did differently this time. My paintings usually start with a sketch of a person, but these started with ink wash drawings I had done of drizzly, foggy scenes with no people. I liked the mood in them, and I wanted the paintings to echo that. The people were added as the paintings progressed, which is probably why the people are generally smaller, and the narratives tend to be about the relationship of the characters to their surroundings. It's one of the things I like about old Chinese paintings, there is so much space and atmosphere that the dramas of the characters seem

insignificant. Another thing I did differently this time was working on all of the paintings at once. It helped me to think about them as a group, and I liked that I could progress on the ones I wanted to on a particular day. The only down side was when the show date was getting closer and I didn't have anything finished.

Q: What does the title "Solstice" mean to you? Is this a reference to the passage of a season, or some wider meaning attached to the movements of the mysterious characters within the works?

To me it evoked ancient, pre-Christian, even pre-classical religions, like the Druids, Stonehenge, etc. Things we know nothing about. I like the mysterious, ritualistic connection with the word. I tried to research it, but there wasn't much to be found. I was reading a history of Christmas, which said that probably nobody really knew when Jesus was born, but since there was already a winter solstice holiday in Rome called Saturnalia, the Christians just shoehorned Christmas into that. And the Romans had previously done the same thing with Saturnalia to a pagan December holiday feast that existed because people had to slaughter their animals if they couldn't feed them through the winter. Each era's myths and rituals seem to take liberally from the previous ones, so there is this continuity that goes far back into history. It's the



meaning I get from the title, and something I wanted to express in the paintings.

Q: There appears to be a movement, a migration even, occurring in these pieces. Are the paintings representing some sort of exodus, movements of people leaving an area or preparing for an event of some sort?

Life is so fragile, and death is always near. That was part of the meaning from the title “Solstice” too — that there is death, but then there is rebirth, in a continuous cycle. I find it comforting to think about death that way, instead of as just an ending. In answer to the question, I think migrations typify that cyclical nature of life.

Q: In many of your works, the characters are looking across a divide, whether it’s a body of water, a road, a gap, or some other kind of break in the landscape. Is there significance to that?

Those gaps have metaphorical meaning. It’s a divide between worldly reality and another place. That place could be called spiritual, or metaphysical, but the most important characteristic is that it’s not here it’s there. And since a painting is static, the girl looking across the river will always be looking across the river. It’s an unreachable destination.

Q: It also appears that the individuals within these scenarios are fairly oblivious to their environments, or to the objects nearby or even looming over them. To what do you think we owe that effect — are the characters specters of some long-ago residency, dimensional echoes of some parallel universe, or possibly just dreamy inhabitants that are under a spell of some sort?

I like all of those! It might sound like a cop-out, but all of those ideas are valid. I have my own ideas about the story behind each painting, but I wonder if I say what they are, will it invalidate other people’s stories? Paintings and stories should have unanswered questions, as long as they are interesting questions, of course. It allows the viewer to collaborate in the story. I thought the show “Lost” was great for that reason. Each week it suggested bizarre possibilities, and rarely explained them. It made the experience totally unique. It would have been a dis-service to the audience if all things were neatly tied up at the end.

Q: You seem to have a rich stream of ideas and

depictions of scenarios that have a definite mood and tone. How do you decide which ideas become large paintings and which ones are smaller? Does the idea present itself with that answer or do you have to work it out along the way as you prepare the canvases?

I work on un-stretched canvas so I can change the dimensions if needed. Most ideas seem to work as medium sized paintings. When I had the initial idea for the largest painting in the show The Orchard, I knew it had to be big. There is something that only a very big painting can do, and only when seen in person, which is to give the illusion that one could physically enter the painting. But big paintings take so much time — it’s a huge commitment.

Q: As well as having an entirely new body of paintings and a solo exhibit, you have your first collection of works published recently, is that right? Will that book be available for your show and will you be there to sign them if so?

Yes! It’s titled *The Well* and is a lovely hardcover edition. I’m really excited about the book. It’s amazing to have this very well-produced physical document collecting a group of my paintings. If anyone brings the book to the show, I’d be happy to sign it of course. The gallery will have them for sale too, and there will be a book signing on Saturday, September 20 from noon to 2 pm, also at Arcadia Contemporary.

Q: Thanks for spending some time with us. One last question, what does the future hold for you and your paintings? Are there any other exhibitions or events that feature your work that we should know of?

I have a large painting in a show with an incredibly talented group of artists at the Long Beach Museum of Art. The show is called “Masterworks: Defining a New Narrative,” it’s up from October 23, 2014 to February 1, 2015 and features 14 of the current movement’s top talents showing one large-scale painting each. After that I’m looking forward to taking a camping trip, and other things that will be outside my studio. Thanks a lot.



SELENA WONG

Selena Wong is an illustrator and artist, born in Hong Kong under the sign of the twins. Like the urban environment of her place of birth, Selena’s work reflects the petit surroundings, the places tucked away, forgotten, and removed from reality. Interested in superstition, folklore and the fantastical, Selena’s meticulously detailed translations of her daydreams and nightmares are both playful and disturbing. She currently works and lives in Toronto with her Netherland dwarf rabbit.

Off the Page, with Selena Wong
OCTOBER 25, 2012 ~ NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS

Off the Page is an exclusive series produced by the NMAF that reaches out to former National Magazine Award winners to find out what their awards have meant to them and what they’re up to now.

Q: Back in 2009 you graduated from the Ontario College of Art & Design and your work appeared in, among other places, The Walrus and was later nominated for a National Magazine Award. How did you get started illustrating for magazines, and how did your work grab the attention of *The Walrus*?

The first illustration that started it all was a piece done for *PlanSponsor* magazine with Art Director SooJin Buzelli. I had a chance to meet SooJin during a semester of study at the Rhode Island School of Design through OCAD’s

mobility/exchange program.

As for *The Walrus*, I applied for an art internship with the magazine in 2009, and through the interview process I met the art director Brian Morgan and the senior designer Paul Kim. Since I majored in illustration at the Ontario Collage of Art & Design, the portfolio I brought with me was full of illustrations from my fourth-year thesis.

I had no samples of any graphic design/layout work so I wasn't an ideal candidate at the time, but was later so fortunately offered to do an editorial illustration for the magazine, "The True Sorrows of Calamity Jane" (*The Walrus*; July/August 2009).

Q: At this year's National Magazine Awards gala you won the Gold award for illustration ("Meet You at the Door"). This piece seems exemplary of much of your body of work: fantastical, dream-like, full of wonder. In composing a piece like this, to what extent does the text or the author or the art director guide you, and to what extent are you guided by your own style and instinct?

I really enjoyed illustrating Lawrence Hill's story and not to mention had a blast at the NMA gala. For this particular project, I worked with Paul Kim, the senior designer at *The Walrus*, who introduced Hill's story accompanied by a few proposed key imageries.

With Paul's suggestions in mind, I highlighted words and phrases that I thought represented the climax of the story after reading it through several times. From that point on, I created two or three sketches based on those highlighted moments I had set aside. I then sent the sketches to Paul while secretly hoping that he would pick the sketch I yearned most to develop.

Luckily, what Paul thought worked best for the story and the audience of *The Walrus* was a piece that was meant to capture the most dreamy atmosphere of one specific setting. It was a description of the beautiful starry sky that tried to divert the gaze from the most important job in life in the vast Canadian Prairies.

The approach I used for this illustration is one that I learned and exercised throughout my training in illustration at OCAD. I appropriate the same practice to all of my work. Through illustrating, I aim to determine the part in a piece of writing where the author opens up to the reader. Sometimes this moment is not the most meaningful and significant one, yet it captures the essence of the story. I believe that it enables me to involve and evoke the deeper emotions in the audience.

Q: What impact does winning a National Magazine Award have on a young artist, professionally or personally?

As a young artist, it is a great honour to be recognized nationally, which in turn provides many assurances of support for my career. I was thrilled to be nominated for a National Magazine Award in 2009 even though I only received a honourable mention. That is why I was very surprised to learn that I was given a rare second chance and nominated for a NMA a second time with The Walrus!

Even with greater astonishment, this time I was called up on stage to receive the Gold award. An award not only provides charming publicity but it raises the standards in my work and, therefore, produces a wonderful opportunity to surpass my previous accomplishments.