



GETTING REAL WITH PAINTER MARC DENNIS

by: ALEJANDRO JASSAN
NOVEMBER 19, 2013

The history of art is long and complicated. It has been shifting and shifting... and then shifting again. Very few artists are able to defy the notions of art and how we look at it. Marc Dennis is one of them. His hyperrealist paintings push the boundaries of photography and painting, and make the viewer wonder if what they are looking at was really made by the hand of a man.

Dennis is a Brooklyn-based painter, who happens to have a great sense of humor. His most recent work explores how the viewer perceives art, finds meaning in it, interprets it. He graciously opened his studio doors to The WILD for a preview of his upcoming show at Hasted Kraeutler aptly titled "A Curator And A Rabbi Walk Into A Bar..."

When did you decide you wanted to be an artist?

I don't believe I had a choice. I was an artist from a very early age. I began drawing at age four or five, developing my skills as I grew older and never looked back. I've been making things to look at all my life.

What is the best thing about being an artist?

One of the best things about being an artist is to be part of a fascinating history of visual art and symbology. It always makes me smile to think I am a link in the historical and ongoing conversation about painting and art—about the ways in which we look, see, and interpret the world. Another somewhat critical aspect about being an artist that seems to have kept me focused as well as somewhat eccentric all these years, is the fact that drawing and painting has always been a way for me to make sense of the world. It seems to me that a natural human inclination is to strive to make sense of one's surroundings; and with art, I am able to create parallel alternate realities, and to share those realities. And last but certainly not least, it's an amazing feeling to be appreciated for what I truly enjoy doing. I count my lucky stars every time I step into the studio knowing I am doing what I am called to do. As difficult and challenging it is being a professional artist, in particular the absurd amount of hours and sacrifices of working in the studio, I feel blessed.

How long does it take you to finish one painting?

This is a silly question on one level but I totally understand why it is often asked. To be honest, I've never kept track of hours. I always work on several paintings at a time, sometimes up to eight paintings at a time, moving from one to another, and possibly over the course of say, a year, those eight paintings will be completed. But to say how much time it took to make each one is impossible. Painting is a very unique animal, involving many hours just spent simply looking, discouraging any semblance of keeping track of actual "time." My process, however, is fairly straight forward. I internalize ideas, images, thoughts, and feelings all the time. I am constantly gathering pieces in my mind in an attempt at coming up with something timely. I'm always thinking about what would make a good and effective and contemporary painting. Once I arrive at an idea, which may take a week, a month, or a year, I make lots of sketches arriving at an even clearer idea as to what I want. Then I hire models and a photographer and set up a photo shoot, to include props and all. I combine the results of the photo shoot, pouring over photos, combining more fresh ideas until I arrive at a final idea and consequent composition into both a digital image and pencil or pen drawing. That's the epiphany stage. Then I pencil the entire composition onto linen or cotton duck and paint. I remain open for changes to occur throughout the process, however, as long as it feeds my artistic intentions.

When do you know a painting is 'finished'? Is it an instinct? An epiphany?

When my gut and mind agree a piece is finished, it's finished. I guess you could call it an epiphany. Or just pure joy.

How did you consider the placement of your pieces—the context of the space? Do you picture them in a house, a gallery, a museum?

I rarely, if ever, start out a piece considering its placement unless it's a commission. I do however always wish for my paintings to find good homes. What artist wouldn't?



What is your dream project?

I have many dream projects. One is to paint a series of large scale portraits of Holocaust survivors. I've been interviewing survivors over the past few years and in their old age their faces tell very individual, unique, sad, and motivating stories of which I'd like to capture and forever present with dignity. I'd also like to paint a series of large scale portraits of Lakota and Cheyenne Indians, and use the money from sales to assist with education on reservations, namely the Pine Ridge Rez, where I lived for three months in the mid-90s. I've always wanted to paint monster scale floral bouquets—a combination of epic, timeless, and exuberant flowers with a nod to the Baroque and Fantin-Latour.

If you were Leonardo Da Vinci painting the Mona Lisa, what would you do differently?

Cleavage.

What can we expect from you in the future?

Wow, there's so much going on. I'm currently working on a six-part video series on six Holocaust survivors in a collaborative effort with an Israeli filmmaker. I'm also working on a series of short videos titled, "Dead Nazis" and another about an artist in a concentration camp. Film intrigues me; it's a powerful medium. I'm also working on an app about entomophagy—the practice of eating bugs. And then there's a bunch of book ideas I'm working on. From two children's books specifically designed for my own kids, to a book about my personal coming of age stories—from when I was fourteen and shot a man, and when I was fifteen and got arrested for grand larceny, to the time I was eighteen and mixed a gallon of ammonia with a gallon of bleach—not knowing I was basically making mustard gas inside my then girlfriend's apartment. She was asleep at the time. It turned very ugly fast. And, of course, you can always expect more paintings from me. I have a lot of ideas.

Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone and discovered a whole new genre of art? How did it turn out?

I'm never really in a comfort zone.

If you could go back in time, would you change something?

This question freaks me out. I'm unable to wrap my head around it. My current happiness with my life, my wife, my kids, my career. . . informs me that I have few, if any, regrets. Thinking about how I might have done things differently at this time is tempting fate and messing with the little angel and devil that nap on my shoulders.

What is your WILD wish?

My WILD wish is for the world as we know it is to have less hatred, less intolerance, less racism, less antisemitism, less bullying, and less judging. . . and then, more kindness, more creativity. In a perfect world, I would like to have peace. World Peace.

