



INTERVIEW // LIZ RICE MCCRAY

Pedro Bonnin creates hyper-realistic figurative paintings on canvas that intertwine vibrant color and negative space to create a high sense of drama and allure. We were excited to have a chance to ask Pedro some questions about his art and learn a little about Pulque, a traditional Mexican drink. Many thanks to Pedro Bonnin for taking the time answer our questions. To see more of Pedro's work, visit www.pedrobonnin.com.

I'm always curious where people are at the present time that we interview them; will you describe where you are right now? This way everyone reading along can imagine the setting.

I'm in Cuernavaca, my hometown, at Pulquería "La Guayaba," a colorful Pulque and Mezcal bar owned by my friend Francesco and his brother Aldo. Pulque is a traditional Mexican drink that native cultures drank way before Columbus arrived to America. It is made by fermenting sap from the maguey plant. It can also be mixed with fruit such as zapote, guanábana, melón, guayaba and many more to obtain what's known as a "curado." I'm sitting by myself, I'm supposed to meet a dancer from a local contemporary dance company to see if I can convince her to help me with some photographs I need for a new project I have in mind. While I wait I'm having a beer, as tempting as it sounds, having any other thing may seriously impair my ability to give proper answers to this interview.

What is the process you use to conceptualize a piece, refine it, "test it," etcetera, so you do not get part way through and discover, "this is not working"?

I've always been an unredeemed daydreamer. I'm also a big reader and I spend a lot of time watching movies, art books and magazines, so images come easily to me. When I'm about to start a new series of paintings I try to picture people in action: flying, falling, jumping, running or fighting. I then do sketches of this image and twist them a little for dramatic effect. I ask friends or family to pose for me, the sketches provide a starting point for the first photographs but then I give them small directions and ask them to move freely to make a little space for surprise and the unexpected. I try to make as many photos as I can. Later, working on the computer, I select the most promising pictures and I filter and tweak them until I get something interesting. I may combine two or three photographs to form a single image. By the time I get to the painting part I've already spent a lot of time with the final images so I know which ones are going to work on a canvas and which ones are not. If in the middle of the process the picture is not working, it's usually because a problem of execution and not so much a problem of composition (although I've had those too) and then I just have to work harder to get it right.

Your paintings are pretty insane, they could almost be mistaken as digital, will you tell us a little about your background? How did you get into realism?

I started painting when I was very young. The first paintings I made that galleries took in and sold were very literary paintings. At the time I was reading lots of Borges, Kafka, Calvino, Allan Poe, Cortazar... These paintings were something like illustrations for mysterious stories or strange fables that people had to figure out. They had little characters in them and the style was somehow a little naive, I've been to Europe and was very influenced by the early Italian masters: Giotto, Simone Martini, Cimabue, Lorenzetti, Duccio di Buoninsegna. After a while I got tired of telling stories through painting and the psychological side of it started to weigh heavy on me. I went to college, studied philosophy and got a master's degree. I was teaching, went through the whole history of art, went back to Europe and was now interested in very different painters: Velazquez, Caravaggio, Ingres, Rembrandt,

Titian, Rubens, David. I wanted to make paintings that relied more on pictorial values like color or form than in narratives. Instead of looking to my inner imaginative world I wanted to pay attention to the outside world around me. I wanted to make striking paintings, paintings that captured people's attention right from the beginning, like a KO instead of having the judges decide. This is where fashion photography comes in, I took from it its allure but more important its sense of the immediate and that certain urgency that comes from having very little time to cause an impression. My plan was to keep discourse to a minimum, to simplify the storytelling and to put tension, drama, and frozen-action in its place (I know this is an oxymoron but that's precisely where the tension comes from). In order to get away with this I realized I needed to make my images as realistic as possible.

Is there an element of self-portraiture in your work?

Naturally, a painting can tell a lot about the artist behind it. More so in modern and contemporary art where finding one's own voice or style, that is being original, becomes a mandate and an obsession for many artists. Besides that, in a strict sense, I wouldn't say there's an element of self-portraiture in my work. I like looking at other people more than I like looking at myself.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced as an artist?

I'll say the biggest challenge I face as an artist is knowing when to stop what I've been doing and move on to something new. Stepping out of the comfort zone and moving into new territory can be terrifying and for a while even paralyzing, but it's also very exciting and in the end it's what keeps me alive.

Where can people check out more of your art?

Here's the gallery that currently represents me: JoAnne Artman Gallery (www.joaneartmangallery.com)

Any last words for our readers?

The headmaster of a Zen monastery wanted to retire so he gathered all the monks in the meditation hall and then placed a glass of water in the center of the room. He then said, "Whoever tells me what this is without calling it by its name would become my successor." The first to answer was a young and ambitious monk, he said, "I wouldn't say this is a wooden shoe." The rest of the monks gave similar answers. Finally, the monk in charge of the kitchen stood up, walked to the glass of water and without saying a word, tipped it over with his foot spilling the water on the floor. The headmaster smiled and named him his successor. Thank you.

Thank you so much Pedro.