

Life Imitates Art School

by

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My paintings are about everyday life and story telling, capturing the ordinary moments that might have been overlooked. I got this idea in my Arts in Education class from a TEDTalk called “Homework for Life” during my second semester junior year. Matthew Dicks, a professional storyteller, was the speaker. He takes five minutes at the end of every day to write down some things to remember, the best story from the day. He calls that routine his “homework for life”. I found it really interesting so I started doing my own homework for life practice. When I came back to campus after being online for all of Junior year, my stories started to get more interesting than they were when I was on Zoom. I decided to start making a drawing of my story every day.

I make my work by being vigilant in experiencing my life. Then at the end of the day, I write down the best story from my day and make a quick gestural drawing from that moment in time. Some of those drawings are then lucky enough to become my paintings. I love the sketch format because of the sheer amount of beautiful moments that they show, but the ones that become paintings I really focus on. My sketchbook of drawings is awesome to flip through though, it's like the people who record one second videos every day. I thought it was really important to display my sketchbooks with my work for my Senior Project show. I want to capture the beauty in storytelling, and the fleeting moments of everyday life.

Much of my work is made using photographs in one way or another. Whether they are pieced together to make a scene or the exact moment I wanted was captured. The photos I use to make my initial drawings are taken from my everyday life. Sometimes I'll have a suspicion that whatever is happening will be the best story that day. Sometimes luckily we capture the exact moment I wanted or one of my friends thinks to capture a photo of something for me to paint. Other times I use photos that we all posed for to post on Instagram while we were going out. Sometimes many of these photos are strung together to make one image. I've found that in order to make interesting work I have to abide by pretty much the opposite of Ted Mosby's "nothing good ever happens after 2 am" rule. This is why, unlike Matthew Dicks, I make my daily drawings the next day rather than at the end of my day. I spend much of my day taking photos of what I'm doing that I hope will make it into a painting.

If I'm honest, I get shy about comparing my work to artists in art history but of course there are always similarities and influences. Much like the artist Sarah McEaney put it, “My paintings are totally and purposefully autobiographical but are also edited, embellished, and fantasized. An anecdote or a story is the impetus to make the painting”. In contemporary art history the artist I think about the most is Salman Toor. His paintings are about parties and relationships between LGBTQ+ characters which to me is very close to home, home being my life at Purchase. Alice Neel is another good one who paints the people dear to her, but she paints more individual, personality rich portraits while I focus on the relationships. I like to believe that my paintings are the “Essences of ordinary events made tangible”, which is how Mernet Larsen describes her work.

Many of the events in my paintings are just ordinary occurrences that might happen to an art school undergraduate student. Many things happened to me this semester that I translated through my paintings.



I tried alcohol for the first time with my roommate and the cops came to make us dump it out,



I opened up to two of my flatmates that I wasn't as close with about having feelings for my ex,



We had a party in Alumni where I realized that a guy I TA with was also my friend's boyfriend, an old friend asked my flatmate out for lunch, an actor did a bit and pushed me, and an old friend's sister was flirting with one of his friends,



My roommate threw a fake party and two of my friends and I had a fake love triangle,



My ex's roommate was hitting on my flatmate and she was uncomfortable so my ex and I swept in to break them up,



My friend-with-benefits made me a cup

being vaccinated,

of tea while he was lying to me about



A pretty barista wrote a heart on my Starbucks cup,



My flatmate was overcharged for water so the salesman presented her with a singular chicken nugget,



The pretty barista and I kissed at the valentine's day party,



My flatmate did a photoshoot of me and our friend while a different flatmate was throwing popcorn at us,



My British classmate and her French roommate came to my friend's birthday party but the cops showed up after a different classmate and his girlfriend fought his ex-girlfriend,



We had a Euphoria party theme and my friend left his phone to vlog while I was obsessed with everyone's outfits,



My ex stayed till 5 am, my mom moved out, the pretty barista climbed out her window, my friend-with-benefits was on a date and I threw up all in one day,



I went to the city and brought my sister back to visit campus, my friend made watermelon jungle juice for her birthday, we saw my neighbor's senior project, we went for a walk in the rain, and my flatmate and I physically fought at Starbucks,



I met my flatmate's long lost cousin and developed a crush on her the same day I had a girl from tinder spend the night but I gave her pjs to borrow as if it was bestie vibes only,



I kissed my flatmate's long lost cousin while listening, my flatmate's crush's roommate rejected the pretty barista, and my roommate kicked some guy out of the hoe down for looking through our stuff for a condom while everyone was spilling their drinks on the floor,



My flatmate's long lost cousin texted all my flatmates asking to be my girlfriend, we saw a queer photography exhibit, we had a picnic, saw a drag show, met a small child with a stick, and jumped at the top of a mountain all in Montreal,



I caught COVID and spent some time with my water bottle which cameos in many of my paintings.

SUNY Purchase sometimes feels a lot like the TV show *Greendale*, in that "It's a shit show my God but it's this show I want to be there" as Peter McPoland put it in his song *Shit Show*.

Ever since I can remember I've been drawn to the color pink. I think because I was the first born in my family and my parents were excited and so all of my things were pink in a gender reveal kind of way. Since then I've always felt most comfortable in pink, or feminine things like lace and silk and frilly dresses. I think a lot of the reason I dated mostly men in my life so far is because I was afraid of not feeling feminine enough next to a girl. The aggressively pink and feminine clothing might be me overcompensating, but also it just feels right. Looking at my paintings from this year chronologically the color has shifted very much. The pink and green palette reminds me of when, in freshman year, I asked all my new friends their favorite color and most of them said "green". The contrast of green to my entire pink wardrobe and personality was coincidental and amusing. I think the students' tendency at Purchase is to be free to express themselves through weird clothing and dyed hair has been influential on my painting. In her artist talk on campus Clarity Haynes quoted Lady J saying "The body is just a cheap suitcase". The people at Purchase are especially important to me because, as Palaniuk said "Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everyone I've ever known."

Compositionally, my work has transitioned as well. I used to choose one snapshot image as a moment in time and use that as a reference, a moment that was captured for real. Towards the end of the year though, I started putting multiple different moments into the same painting. I thought this helped convey the scattered and busy way I talk about my work. I tried to compose

my stories in a way that was clever. Sharon Horvath pointed out to me the theological references in the painting titled Sunday March 6th 2022 of the giant phone coming from the top. There's the reference to The Last Supper with the people in the middle at the table, the giant hand of God coming down from the top, and the kneeling in the bottom right corner. There are also parallels between the hand of God and the hypothetical TV writers of our lives. The one where I'm climbing on the picnic table up to my bed I set up that way because I met a girl I really liked in a screenplay editing meeting with my flatmate on the same day that I had a tinder date coming over. I wasn't totally interested in the date but she slept over, so I put a copy of my flatmate's screenplay under my foot implying that I would slip on it and fall back down to the scene below.

I think while some people see me as naive and overly optimistic, for me it's really important to see the world through rose colored lenses. I want to teach people to look at their own lives and see the beauty in the little moments. As COVID became less dangerous, we all became excited to be around people again and so desperate to make up for lost time. Right now really is much more interesting to document than any other time I've lived through. One sunny day my friends and I were sitting outside just doing homework together and my friend Trevor Duits said, "Not to be corny, but I feel like this is a day I'll look back on when I'm 40". Sometimes when crazy coincidental things happen I blame it on the "TV show writers of my life", which makes me feel a lot like Abed from the TV show Community. The character Abed is always going through life observing school and his friends as if they're on a TV show, commenting on things like bottle episodes and alternate timelines. Freshman year we used to joke about our TV show that my friend Ali Caruso named "Life Imitates Art School". Sometimes I feel like I'm gossiping through my paintings, which is very like me in my normal life outside of the studio. The gossiping also feels somehow specifically feminine or at least stereotypically specific to non cis males, which can also be said about my paintings. I'm like an anthropologist studying what life is like at Purchase College. Being at college is like being in a pressure cooker, relationships develop much faster than they do in the regular world. We take ourselves too seriously sometimes so I always try to paint my worse or most dramatic moments with some humor. It's important to live every day to the fullest and appreciate what you have. You never know when something crazy is going to take even the little things away from you. I learned to appreciate everyday life from living through the pandemic while I was an art student at Purchase College.

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