

Memphis Erwin - artist influences & intent

I get a lot of questions about where my art fits in. Am I an illustrator because my work can be illustrative or am I a sculptor because my body of work also contains 3D objects? I've made video art and paintings but I don't identify myself by either of those works. What I AM is a post-media artist. I work without limitations or expectations; my art starts with an intent and the form of medium it takes is whatever I deem best suits it.

I used to mostly do painting but after a long time of being unhappy and feeling constrained by all of the expectations and history that comes with the medium. I realized that to be a truly great painter I would have to choose to embrace tradition or go against it. So I took a long retrospective at my work and ideals. My last body of work as a painter was very concerned with iconography, branding, commercialism and production, in those ways my new work still concerned with the same type of ideas.

Working in paint did get me to explore my interest and various other techniques but it was time to move on. I stopped painting but I didn't lose anything in the process; I take my knowledge and experiences I learned as a painter and bring them into everything I do.

I have exceptional interest and knowledge on animal anatomy but having a firm understanding of evolution allows me to apply it to human and vice versa because all living organisms evolved under the same circumstances and laws that we developed under. All Vertebrate have the same bones, they're just in different places; a femur is a femur, a sternum is a sternum and with knowledge of a dog I can draw a rabbit. I apply the same thought process to all other skills.

This philosophy of interchangeable skills and knowledge is what allows me to abandon my preconceptions of identifying and working as a specific medium of artist. I make toys,

comics, illustrations, books, sculptures and anything else I see fit because my art is based on experience and not a medium. For my body of work I create my own series of toys and narratives influenced by my own childhood experience and interests.

Early on in my childhood the lines between “Work” and “Play” grew increasingly blurred thanks to my father. The year I was born he began his career as a brand manager beginning with DC Comics. He oversaw and approved or denied everything DC. He created style guides and managed toy lines for all of DC’s characters; some of the biggest being Batman, Superman and Wonderwoman. Now he’s managing Hasbro’s Transformers and working to flesh out their world.

My father taught me everything about his work and the value of intellectual property from an early age. I grew up designing my own characters, writing my own stories and coming up with brands. I continued to create my own intellectual properties up until college when I began to focus on painting. Now is the time to get back to my DNA. I’ve been developing my own toy and character brand for over a year now, dubbed Memphigs. I use my new IP to explore different narratives and build my own world. My toy figures are my new canvas to build creative works.

Most of my education was spent in private schools due to my dyslexia. The schools helped me learn methods to work around it but it was a challenge. I couldn’t read well past the average age of childhood development. The struggle I had with my education caused me to find creative outlets to express myself beyond my disability. I took to drawing, creating characters and narratives. Even making my own comics which I so proudly lent to my school library. I’ve worked rigorously to learn despite my Dyslexia and I keep the same intense drive in my creativity as I applied it to education.

I'm formally influenced by artists such as Duchamp and Johns even if it might not be apparent. Outsider artists are extremely influential to me such as Henry Darter but my favorite outsider is Mark Hogencamp who started doing photography and narratives with WWII figures and dolls. He started building a town for his army figures and taking pictures of them as a form of physical therapy and emotional relief. Hogencamp is deeply invested in his little world and it's all done for himself.

Just like Hogencamp I'm a world builder. With my artwork I create my own reality with it's own cast of characters with their own lives, concerns and conceptions of art. My art is about this world and realizing it as a brand. Whether it's through film, ink, figures or any other medium, my world will keep expanding.