Insequential Sequence

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by

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Since childhood, my passion to create has driven me to search for the simplest truths within the world I live in. Throwbacks of pop culture have always decorated my life and their influences are directly reflected in my work. The nightly news, advertisements, pulp magazines, film, and music all play an extremely important role in my work as each influence becomes a layer of spirit and emotion in my mixed media paintings and photography. It’s those ordinary and mundane gifts that I find in each normal day that spill the truth and the essence of my life into my art.

Popular culture has always filled my life with vivacity, passion, and a yearning for creativity. Admittedly, I’ve long been an artist that gets lost in the contemporary message of my work. I do after all own it and somewhere in my creative mind the process of creation and the object as art become my unified gospel in a sacred delivery and message. I absorb my surroundings, dissect it, rearrange it, and spit it back out to the world as a reinterpretation of the original, and on occasion transform it into something totally original within itself.
Insequential Sequence

Introduction

There has always been an inner, almost spiritual drive that has continually propelled me to the arts. I’m compelled and seduced by it. I have no choice. I simply must create. My earliest memory of this returns me to a small home in Virginia Beach. The house had pale yellow siding, an open carport on the side, and a curvy sidewalk. I was six years old, the oldest child of a naval officer, my girlfriend was Nancy Sinatra, and creativity was my best friend. Nothing thrilled me more than a fresh sketchbook and a brand new tin of colored pencils. I was consumed by the music of the sixties from the Beatles, to Charlie Pride, to Tom Jones. Equally, the mod fashion trends, creative advertising, and television commercials grabbed my attention and absorbed me. I spent much of my time drawing those things I enjoyed most – famous television icons, American cars, and colorful corporate identities. Some of my favorites were Beany and Cecil, Chevrolets, and those familiar corporate logos of the NBC peacock and the TEXACO Sky Chief.

Nancy Sinatra and I never wed, but my youthful doodling married my fascination of popular culture to my life as an artist. For two decades, I exhibited and received national recognition for my mixed media culture-inspired paintings while also being a stay at home dad. Performing both roles was incredibly rewarding, and often the creativity I found in one, fed the other. Just as I had as a child, my path as an artist found the greatest inspiration in the normalcy of life. These continue to reflect themselves in my art today as displayed in the photographic sequence A Saturday With
Papa (Appendix, 1). The memory inspired images making up this sequence capture a kaleidoscope of mental snapshots. The result is both a memorable and abstracted narrative.

Although I’d spent much of my adult life building a successful career as a fine artist, by the age of forty-seven I began feeling stagnant with my artistic growth. This came at a time when our children were becoming young adults and my mentoring role was requiring less attention. I welcomed this opportunity with change and made the decision to return to college as an adult student in hopes of expanding my art and myself. After researching numerous options, I found Virginia Commonwealth University’s Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) program appealed to the personal goals I was looking for in my higher education fine art experience. In less than two years, the MIS-IAR program has engaged me as an intellectual artist, provided me with opportunities to explore new and challenging media, and reconnected me to new art communities as well as my artistic faith and expression.

**Inspired By Life’s Normalcy: Creative Suburbia and an All American Boy**

My interpretation of the world around me is similarly driven by the same interests I had as a youngster. I refuse to live in a cultural vacuum and the media that surrounds my life makes sure of that. My paintings and photography are a representation of popular culture, creatively displaying or questioning the ideals of Americanism.  

*Stumbling Into Freedoms* (Appendix, 2) represents the visual calm of youth and safety from my childhood while growing up in small town America. The photographs of a soda bottle with a screen printed label that reads “Enjoy” resting on top of a 50s era
girlie magazine, hand drawn peace symbols hanging from a budding tree limb, and a suspended pair of metal wheeled roller-skates each represent hopefulness and innocence, while boarding on the edge of sexual curiosity and flirtation. The impact and influences of my growing up in the liberal and changing culture of the United States during the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and The Woodstock decade are all precursors to the art that I create today. As a child, television allowed me to repeatedly watch as iconic leaders of hope were gunned down on our nation’s streets, longhaired and free spirited youth expressively danced while demanding a war’s end, and an Apollo mission delivered men to walk in places unimaginable. It was daily events like these that became a poignant backdrop for my youth as I grew up in suburbia USA.

Such token segments of history were selectively fed to me nightly “in living color”. Equally important to me as the daily headlines were the countless thirty-second commercial vignettes that television delivered to our living room. With such a barrage of media, my understanding or perhaps expectation of what it was to be American were stage builders in defining my average clean-cut, blue-collared, pre-teen American boyhood. It was through the combinations of society, news events, and eye candy advertising that I found a passion for culture. Art became something different. It was changing the world around me and in turn it was responsible for changing me. Poets merged into songwriters while visual artists fused fine art into commercial advertising and then back again. A console television and my lime green portable AM radio personally delivered the bitter ugliness of the world around me along with the magnificent beauty of it at the same time. I was enamored by it all.

My works are an arrangement of personal reflective moments combined with an
emotional capture of gestural marks, compositional space, and time. Through the use of contemporary methods and techniques, I combine visual elements of nostalgia with homogenized qualities of America that often read like an open diary. 1966 (Appendix, 3) displays a visual storyline of Americana with a reminiscent look back. From the sensuality of a hip-hugging bikini to a fur-lined collar, 1966 displays what I recall of an era filled with distinctiveness, personality, and ethos, and void of the patronizing political correctness found in today’s society.

Painting the Nothing and Finding Resolve in the Negative Space

Over recent years, I’ve come to find a creative balance with my work through the planned use of negative space. Unlike when I was younger, my recent work relies less on the representational aspect of my subjects to define the emotion in a piece. Through controlled and planned elements of design and composition, I redefine the void areas of my compositions as a necessary focal place for the viewer’s attention.

Within the textural quality of the negative space, a preservation of spirit, time, and emotion is set. I break the space into areas of controlled brushwork and organized abstraction. These nonrepresentational areas become a quiet place for both the eye and the mind and are quite essential in establishing the whole. Often within these areas the painting begins as one thing, and through the evolution of building layers from gesso, paints, and the markings of various drawing instruments, becomes something totally different. Then upon reaching a certain stage, I reverse the process, covering up much of what was previously left behind on the paper or canvas. The effect creates a combination of layered translucency and an ethereal camouflaged opaqueness of what
is left beneath. *America’s Favorite* (Appendix, 4), is a composition that balances the painterly abstraction with representational advertising images. My intent was to create vagueness with the heavily weighted negative space. This is depicted by the textural color and loose brush strokes balancing the iconic cultural identities of Detroit’s muscle era production of the 1960s. The Austrian painter and photographer, Arnulf Rainer’s (b.1933), work is filled with similar qualities with regards to space and markings. He once said, “Painting results from absorbing, creating, and burying painting.” (Rainer, 116) His statement is a mirrored idea to my painting approach and style.

**AM Radio Meets MTV**

As I’ve gained creative momentum, I find myself often returning to those things that most influenced me in younger years. Music and films have long drawn me in and had an incredible authority on the person and artist that I’ve become. The thrill of staying up to watch the flickering of a black and white classic as “Hooray For Hollywood” announced the start of the late, late movie still excites me today. A similar sentiment also applies itself to my incredible love for music. These two mediums are influential in outlining my work, frequently creating a bookmark of time. Through my paintings, photography, and films I evaluate and dissect their inspiration, define their purpose in my life, and reinterpret them as a reflection of my own beliefs.

I’ve been an avid collector of music and films for nearly four decades and have spent years studying both. They’re both a passion of mine and the association I find in each has woven itself into my art for years. In 1981 my life changed with the launch of MTV and the union of film and music as an art form. To this day, even with the music
video format more commonly viewed as an obvious marketing and sales tool, I still consider it an art form with an awaiting bare canvas for true fine art filmmakers. With my longtime interest in film and music, my films are directly influenced by the classic eras of cinema and MTV. The film still, *In Light* (Appendix, 5), combines a sequence of unrelated video footage with early morning sunrise captured during a visit to my father’s grave at Quantico National Cemetery. The sentiment from the combination of visuals with the soundtrack from a child’s toy piano is intended to reflect the innocence, celebration, and hopefulness. Hooray for Hollywood and God save rock and roll.

**Advertising Mirrors Art Mirrors Advertising**

I had a difficult time in my youth splitting the hairs between fine art and the timely term used to define advertising, commercial art. I wasn’t interested in painting Italian Renaissance styled work. It was dated and quite frankly bored me. My creative heroes hadn’t even been added to the art history books yet because they were creating their legacies as I was growing up. What I found most interesting was that they were merging fine art with advertising, making it as easy to access creativity in the supermarkets or service stations as it was in galleries. Those common names associated with pop art became my idols. Equally as inspiring as the works of Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997), and James Rosenquist (b.1933) were the front cover designs of pulp magazines, rock and roll album cover art, and the visual identities of corporations like the Texaco Sky Chief or the Nipper version for the RCA Victor logo. Even those stylized chrome insignias decorating American cars signified art to me. Everything was art.
The attraction and appeal I had with the commercial styling and visual impact of the Pop Art movement of the 1960s moved me and was clearly a factor in directing me toward a career in graphic design and advertising. Just as I had witnessed as a child, the fine art I created over twenty years similarly mirrored the qualities of my advertising work as in *Posed and Primrosed* (Appendix, 6). This is clearly evident through the graphic design and Pop Art inspired themes of the painting. The repetitive subjects, the rich and vibrant colors, and the photocopy styled imagery are a tribute to the graphical styling of the Pop Art movement.

**Engaging the Process**

Process has become as much of a spiritual aspect in my creative process as the technical. The evolution assists me in better defining my path as artist and self. My painting and drawing skills over the years continue to expand and strengthen me. Recently my work has become less about strictly representing pop imagery and increasingly focused more on the emotion within the visual itself as exhibited in *Reclining, Landscape, Nude* (Appendix, 7). This mixed media painting reflects a parallel of the human form to an open and vast landscape.

I’ve experimented and expanded my use of mixed media painting to include combinations of various paints, pastels, and charcoal with photography, photocopies, and several techniques of transfer methods. *Pearls and Deuce* (Appendix, 8) is a mixed media drawing combining gestural painting and charcoal over a sequence of two large-scale black and white photographs. The photograph on the left is a purposely-blurred image of a female figure from a series of captured television stills taken from a classic
era Hollywood film. The right photograph is an industrial landscape image taken in the downtown Manchester warehouse district of Richmond, VA. The pairing of the two images reflects my interest in the balance of humanity with industrialism. *Song of Valentines* (Appendix, 9) uses a similar combined photographic approach as Pearls and Deuce. Though the application of paint has been minimized, gestural marks are applied to accent the composition and movement in the piece. The painting is an illustrative juxtaposition of machined industrialism to human romanticism and emotion.

Digital photography has become a tool in my creative process. With a long history of using traditional film photography as a medium, I was hesitant to make the transition to digital. My primary concern was my fear of losing focus on the art of photography through a number of prefabricated digital processes. What I uncovered however was something totally different. Image manipulation software such as the Adobe Photoshop suite was to become my creative ally, not adversary. Like so many computer software packages, there are numerous preprogrammed effects available to the user. However, the real strength of the digital darkroom relies on more hand building and selective processes by the artist. These processes provide a wide range of control, all based on film camera traditions and the techniques of the wet darkroom, minus the chemicals. My working with these powerful software tools has given me an increased understanding of the art form while at the same time providing me the opportunity to produce some of my strongest work.

While developing the series *Insequential Sequence*, I became interested in the significance that particular events or relationships have when combined with others. Though often unrelated, these unions of sequenced images create a path generating
a storyline. Life itself is the perfect insequential sequence. My interest in developing the series lies in the connection and the result of the narrative and sentiment that unrelated time-based elements have when united together. Through the combination of these unrelated moments and with my intrigue for Americana, Delivering the Goods (Appendix, 10), picturing an antique table fan with the tail of a vintage US Mail airplane and the façade of an abandoned Main Street USA hardware store exhibits a sentimental recollection of innocence. Photo Finish (Appendix, 11) takes a different approach however. In this series of carousel study photographs, the grouping poses an abstract quality due to the random arrangement of the related high contrast and purposely-blurred imagery. These large-scale personal photographic sequences demand a closer look and interpretation from the viewer. In addition to a voice of narrative, each sequence also exhibits a quality of self-portraiture often found in my work.

Smudge Marks, Passion, and Self

While faith is often synonymous with religion, I find a similar passion and spiritual union through my art. Both faith and art are a direct evaluation of self and each provides a healthy personal centering and balance. I find these in the normalcy of the everyday. It’s in that normalcy where I connect, restructure, and distinguish myself as the artist.

Creativity provides me the means to capture pure emotion, one that fills my existence with vivacity, passion, and yearning. It defines me. The resolution is to communicate an emotion, generate a response, and to become enlightened by emotion and spirit. Art provides me the opportunity to study my surroundings and my relation to them. In doing so, I gain a much richer understanding of self. And while commonplace
items or pop icons often appear in my work, relying strictly on their nostalgic appeal is
the farthest from my interest. *Yesterday’s Cardboard Cowboys* (Appendix, 12) exhibits
that what lies beneath these ordinary items is where the truest identity of my work can
be found. Through a collaborative layering of visuals, scribbling text, and passion, my
work exposes the identity of self. My paintings, photography, and films are a composite
of daily experiences, memories, and fervor reflecting time and sentiment for life.
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Gary Linwood Garbett

Education
2010 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Concentration in Fine Arts, Painting, and Photography
Golden Key International Honor Society, University Honor Council 2008-2010
2008 Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication Arts and Media Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Concentration in Communication Arts and Media Studies
Graduated Cum Laude, Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, University Honor Council 2007-2008
2008 Career Studies Certificate in Photography, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA. Concentration in Photography, Minor in Internet Applications Development
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Career Highlights
2008 – present
Media and Communication Specialist, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond VA
1988 - present
Freelance Artist and Graphic Designer, Richmond, VA

Exhibition Highlights
2010 Insequential Sequence, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts Thesis Exhibition, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA
2008 Rawls Museum Annual Juried Exhibition, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA, Juror: Nancy Sausser
2005 Meandering & Escapism (Solo Exhibition), Avenue 805, Richmond, VA Flashback, Flash Forward Juried Exhibition, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA Curator: Leigh Anne Chambers
2004 Searching Truths (Solo Exhibition), West Liberty State College, West Liberty, WV Curator: Robert Villamagna
2003 Searching Truths (Two-Person Exhibition), Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA 40th Rawls Museum Arts Juried Exhibition, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA Awarded Merit Award 10th Annual Juried Regional Art Exhibition, Jo Ann Rose Gallery, Reston, VA Awarded Equal Merit Award, Juror: David Tannous Annual Juried Photography Exhibition, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA Awarded 2nd Place Award, Juror: Jeffrey Allison
Exhibition Highlights (continued)

2002  *Rawls Museum Annual Juried Exhibition*, Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA  
**Awarded 1st Place Award**  
*Biennial 2002 Juried Exhibition*, Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News VA  
Juror: Philip Pearlstein  
*Art on the Half Shell*, Urbanna, VA  
**Awarded Best In Show Award**, Juror: Paul DePasquale

1998  *Icons, Dreams, & Wishes* (Solo Exhibition), Phenomenon Gallery, Richmond, VA

1995  *Paint + Word* (Two-Person Exhibition), Mabey Gallery, Richmond, VA  
Curator: Martha Mabey

1994  *Crucifiction of the Feminine*, Mabey Gallery Richmond, VA  
Curator: Martha Mabey  
*Annual Humor Fine Art Exhibition*, Zenith Gallery, Washington, DC  
*Art on the Wing*, Richmond International Airport, Richmond, VA  
Juror: Beverley Reynolds, Richard Waller  
*Artomotives* (Solo Exhibition), Williamsburg Art Center, Williamsburg, VA  
*Images ’94*, Regional Juried Exhibition, Hub Galleries, Penn State University  
University Park, PA, Juror, Elizabeth Osborne

1993  *Sylvan J. Rienks Memorial Competition*, Gallery West, Alexandria, VA  
**Awarded 2nd Place Award**, Juror: Patrick Craig,  
*Greater Reston Arts Center Annual Juried Exhibition*, Greater Reston Arts Center,  
Reston, VA, Juror: Jeremy Strick  
*Central South Art Exhibition*, Nashville Parthenon Museum, Nashville, TN  
Juror: Judith Ellen Stein  
*Florida National 1993*, Florida State University Gallery and Museum, Tallahassee, FL  
*48th National Juried Fine Arts Exhibition*, Colorado Springs, CO  
Juror: Warren Wolf  
*CCA Competitive Exhibition ’93*, Community Council for the Arts, Kinston, NC  
Juror: John Beerman

1992  *Dimensions 29th Annual Exhibition*, Sawtooth Building Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC  
**Awarded Award of Excellence and 1st Place Award**  
Juror: David N. Lauderdale  
*Route 66 Revisited National Juried Exhibition*, Red Mesa Art Center  
Gallup, NM and Near Northwest Arts Council, Chicago, Ill,  
*Measuring Up National Juried Exhibition*, Virginia Beach Center for the Arts  
Virginia Beach, VA, Juror: Brooke Alexander  
*56th National Midyear Exhibition*, Butler Institute of American Art Museum,  
Youngstown, OH, Juror: Terry Dintenfass