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02/07/2019 Sabine Elsässer 0 Comments art, fashion, RBLB

Evan Sharma founder of RBLB turns sneakers into works of art

Please introduce yourself and your startup RBLB to our readers!

I am Evan Sharma, and I am a neo-expressionist, fauivst artist. I am also the creative director of the streetwear brand RBLB. And I am also a grade 10 student and live in Canada.

How did you get the idea to RBLB?

Over the past number of years, I have been interested in fashion from both the creative side and the technical side. For instance, because I was expressing my ideas on canvases, and I like sneakers, I thought it would be cool to start creating on sneakers, sort of like thinking about the sneakers as the new canvas. Because I also like to do technical things like slalom skiing and race in sailing regattas, I really also like technical concepts. Ideally, RBLB would exist at the intersection of both creativity and technical design.

The brand, itself, stands for Right Brain, Left Brain and is based on the concept that if you really want to make a significant impact, you need to develop both your right or creative side and your left of analytical side. I think that this is something that I try to live by. Most people know that I work in art and fashion, but I also really love science.

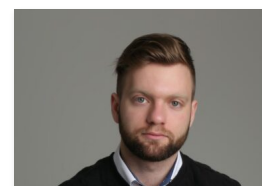
In fact, I go to a specialized science program in school.

For a few years I did research in an area called the microbiome. One project that I worked on was manipulating the microbiome of a cow's rumen to lower methane emissions. I was able to show that by introducing an enzyme into their digestive system might substantially lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Since I am a big mountain skier and love sailing, I am also very passionate about environmental issues. I plan to also explore this theme through the brand.

I think I created RBLB to help tell the story about things that mean a lot to me personally. So the brand stands for living at the intersection between art and science, and it will have a pro-environment theme.

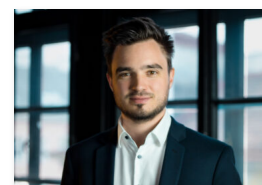
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Being
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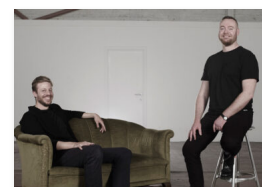
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Have
courage
and
try out
new

ideas!

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Choose
progress
over
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How difficult was the start and what challenges you had to overcome?

It is a bit of a crazy story, but I got into a big art show in Toronto when I was 12. They didn't realize that I was 12, but since it was a juried show, I was able to present. Because I was the youngest to ever get in the show, I appeared in the national media and so people started following



my journey. I was also named one of Toronto's most interesting artists and this drove a lot of attention. There are 2 sides to my business.

In terms of the RBLB streetwear, we are in the final stages of looking at production. I am hoping to launch the brand in a few months time. I will be planning a popup in both Toronto. On the art side, the big challenge is learning how to manage demand given that I only create about 10 original pieces per year.

Who is your target audience?

For my art work, my collectors tend to be middle aged people who are into contemporary art that has an expressionist feel to it. People see tones of Picasso, Basquiat and Matisse in my work, so those who like this style are the ones which my work resonates with.

In terms of RBLB, it is more of a younger crowd, who is looking to express themselves through the clothing. It really appeals to those who want to show their

artistic side but through the meaning of the brand: where art meets science.

What is the USP of your startup?

I think part of my success has been related to a very strong design aesthetic at an early age. I think that people like the fact that even though I am 15, and can appreciate technology, I love nature. So the USP is a clear artistic direction on both canvases and clothing, that also has a pro-environment message.

I also think that part of the USP is youthfulness and having a teenager who is the creative force behind the brand also sends a strong message to the market.

Can you describe a typical workday of you?

I usually get up pretty early and get ready for school. Sometimes when I am eating breakfast, I review interesting ideas in the areas of art, science and entrepreneurship before school. Most of my day is spent at school. When I am done, I usually work for a few hours on my various projects, whether they are art or the RBLB brand.

There are lots of pieces from production of the pieces, to working on social to tell the stories of the pieces. I also have a list of over 1,000 people who I try to keep in touch with on a regular basis, as they are interested in potentially purchasing my next piece of work or just learning about my next project.

I also get a chance to do a lot of interesting special events. Last year I was invited to present my story and live paint at C2 in Montreal. It was an incredible experience speaking in front of over 2,000 people. And then I had an amazing experience speaking at The HATCH Experience in Montana. I have been invited to live paint and take part in Future Stars of Fashion Week in NYC next week and will be doing a TED talk as well. So each of these special events takes time to plan for and to attend. I also am pretty active as a 15 year old, so I spend time training and competing in alpine ski races and in sailing regattas.

I am also working a lot in video and recently was in a documentary with Shopify Studios. And I will be working on another video for a

portrait of Gandhi that I will be doing for a collector in Dubai.

This year will be a pretty big year, because we will be formally launching RBLB through both my Shopify store and pop ups in Toronto and NYC. These will be live events that probably will have me live painting, doing a fashion show and showcasing some documentary films that I have appeared in or am now working on.

Where do you see yourself and your startup RBLB in five years?

I really admire some a few strong art fashion brands like Louis Vutton since Virgil Abloh took over, Raf Simmons, A Cold Wall and Fragment to name a few. In 5 years, I would like to have made significant inroads into the fashion world. I think with the internet, I dont see the need to have retails stores, but would either like to have popups in places like NYC, Toronto, Shanghai and Tokyo or to have a presence in small boutique stores in these major areas. I terms of original art, I would like to be doing significant show, so perhaps things like Art Basel, Frieze or Scope.

In the end, I would really just like to be engaged creatively in what I am doing and be able to pursue my vision and thoughts in a way that they might help others.

What 3 tips would you give other Start-up founders on the way?

Don't be scared to try to do things. I applied to an art show at the age of 12 and that opened up a lot of doors for me. I have launched RBLB because I really like fashion and because I want to connect with people who share my artistic vision. There will always be people who say you can't do something, or your art or product may not be what they like. That is ok, because the world is very diverse and your product appeal to a group of people.

Know the value of what you are creating. At my first show, I felt the prices that my parents thought I should be charging for my larger paintings were not reflective of the quality of art. When I walked around the show and saw what others were charging, I changed my prices. People didn't really hesitate to buy the paintings. In fact, I have now had people purchase my work who have Picassos and Basquiats in their collection, which is really an honour.

The last thing is having a unique product or story.

I think that the marketplace of pretty crowded and that quality in products is a given. To really break through, you have to have a product that is unique. For me, it is all about being authentic. Because I love skiing and have skied in big mountains for most of my life and feel a spiritual connection to them, they figure prominently in my collection and in fact one of my inspirations for RBLB was Tenzing Norgay.

I also think that you have to be able to tell the story of your brand clearly on a variety of media to also break through. Also pick 1 social media channel to help tell your story. I spend a lot of time on my @evansharmaart Instagram channel because it is a highly visual medium that I can show both my art and fashion on and give followers a chance to see some “behind the scenes” footage.

More information you will find [here](#)

Thank you Evan Sharma for the Interview

Statements of the author and the interviewee do not necessarily represent the editors and the publisher opinion again.