

MAD LOVE

Interview: Two Minds With Evan Sharma

The future of art and fashion is here

What were you doing when you were 16? This writer can humbly say he spent most of his time watching NBA dunk highlights and sleeping well into the afternoon.

Evan Sharma is a little different.



After being discovered for his unique creative abilities at the age of 12, Evan has racked up a prestigious list of artistic accolades and created a prolific body of work spanning abstract portraiture, expressive landscapes, and forays into the world of avant-garde fashion and streetwear.

Having already exhibited internationally and captured the attention of some of the world's most prestigious art collectors, there seems to be nothing stopping Sharma's undeniable drive to cultivate his creativity.

It has been detailed in the past that you were initially inspired to become an artist when you visited world class museums and saw the art of da Vinci, Van Gough, Picasso, and Pollock. What was it about seeing these iconic artist's work that resonated with you?

For each it is something different.

For da Vinci, it was his strength in both art and science. He was the definition of Renaissance thinker. His detailed anatomy was amazing, but I also loved that he was trying to do work on bridges and aviation and other areas of design. For Picasso, I love that he reinterpreted figurative work and that his style is instantly recognizable. For Van Gough, I like how his work was very personal and elements of his thinking are displayed in his art. And for Pollock, I like his practical nature and the way he approached painting in a more rugged way. Last year, I created a portrait of Pollock that was sold at auction and I called it, Painting Numbers. The piece actually centered around the number 1.72. I did this because scientists looked at Pollock's work, using a mathematical principle called factorial analysis and showed that the patterns were highly repeatable (1.72 score) and not random at all.

Soon after you started painting, you experienced a meteoric rise to fame and success at the young age of 12. Looking back, what was that time like for you? How did it feel having someone buy your work for the first time?

My very first show, when I was 12, a woman came up to me and said that her daughters saw me on TV in the morning and that she had to come to the show and buy a piece of my work. The show was in Toronto, but she was visiting from LA. She was really a very wonderful woman and she ended up buying my Dylan portrait. I didn't realize it at the time, but she was a serious collector and she has some great work, including a Picasso. So for me, more so than actually selling the painting, it was an incredible honour to know that my work was going to someone who really appreciates art and that she saw something that resonated with her in my work.



You're already impressive body of work is filled with expressive and surreal portraits of pop culture icons like John Lennon and Jean-Michel Basquiat. How would you describe your process when you first decide to start a new piece?

My process is a little different when I am creating a landscape as opposed to a portrait. For a landscape, I am really trying to take a person to a location. While the image is important, the feeling of being in the location is what I am trying to achieve. One of my favourite paintings, I created at 7,000 feet. This was because I love big mountain skiing and am an alpine ski racer. Many people in the world will never be able to experience what it is like to be above the treeline and at the peak of majestic mountains moving in knee deep powder. I actually ended up painting the piece in between ski runs. For me being in the mountains in a very spiritual experience. I want people to feel that when they are looking at my painting. I also like the fact that the canvas lived part of its life in -20 Celsius, was blown off the easel at 7,000 feet and that under a layer of paint went through a freeze, thaw cycle.

When I am working on a portrait, I am trying to think about the person and why they did the things that they did. What were they thinking when they were working. I also approach it as if I am trying to get to know the person. I actually do a fair bit of research about my subjects, reading stories about them, trying to watch movies and old footage about them.



Whether draped in Off White or adorning Goyard backpacks, it's clear that you are sharply attuned with contemporary fashion. What inspired you to get in the game with your own brand RBLB (Right Brain Left Brain)?

For me, it was really an extension of the creative process. 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 to create 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 the 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 at 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 will stand for living at the intersection between art and science, and it will have a pro-environment theme.



Having been selected as one of the 100 participants in NYFW's Fashion Future Stars (Parsons School of Design is waiving their 19+ age limit), do you feel pressure to start making big statements in the fashion game?

I think that it is certainly an honour to be invited. But I am not sure I actually feel pressure. To me, my art and creativity have always been about a journey to learn things that I am interested in and ideas that I want to explore. When I first started painting, I watched many artists work on old footage shown in YouTube. I was fascinated by the techniques used by different artists. Like the way Jackson Pollock used rhythmic movement to throw paint on the canvas and how Jasper Johns worked in encaustic. But I also must have watched Exit Through The Gift shop 50 times, because I liked the way that Shepard Fairey and Banksy were making statements through their art. I think that my goal is to keep exploring ideas and techniques and making sure that I am having fun with the process. In the end, I think that if you are having fun doing what you are doing, other people who share the same interest or philosophy will join you for the journey.



As you continue to expand your careers in art and fashion, who would you liked to collaborate in the future with? Do you have a dream project in mind?

There are a number of designers that I really like. Because of my interest in technical things I would love to work with Stone Island. I was really excited because I asked for, and got, the book, Ideas from Massimo Osti, for my birthday and love some of the designs in it. I also love their Ice jacket which changes colors as the temperature changes. I also really like Louis Vutton and what Virgil Abloh is doing. I think that their fabrics and manufacturing are some of the best, and I think that he is taking their creative side to the next level. I also am a big fan like Heron Preston, A Cold Wall and Fragment.

In terms of Artists, I am a huge fan of Tom Sachs. I think that way that he takes a central theme like Space and NASA and then explores it through diverse mediums like installations and sneakers is very interesting. I actually spend a lot of time doing installations for Halloween! I usually start designing a set a few months in advance and have different scenes planned out. It is pretty cool, because people from all over the neighbourhood have started to help out and the news has broadcasted from our place last year. So I guess, maybe Tom Sachs and I could collaborate on my next Halloween project!



One of your goals as an artist/ creator is to help inspire people, why is that important to you?

I remember seeing that GaryVee said that is we are alive as a human now, that the probability was like many trillion to one. And then if you take living in a place like Canada or the US and having everything that we have, we are extremely lucky. But there are other people in the world who are really struggling. So I think that giving back to society is really important. This is why I have worked with a number of charities to help raise funds.

I also think that with the rise of technology, people are not paying as much attention to art. But I think that art is very important because it allows us to explore and communicate ideas. I think it is very interesting how a clothing designer from Japan can influence teenager from NYC or how a painting that I create may influence the thinking of someone in Africa. I am especially happy when I get letters or DMs on Instagram to @evansharmaart from kids who feel inspired to express themselves after seeing my story or from artists who reach out because they find that the way that I paint liberating in some way.

Find more info on Evan here.

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