

INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST AND OCAD U PROFESSOR: JOHN SCOTT

Interview By Maggie Broda • President of OCAD University Alumni Association • Visual Artist

Maggie Broda recently interviewed Canadian artist John Scott. The iconic artist is an instructor at OCAD University as well as an alum. He was the inaugural recipient of the Governor General's Award for Visual Art in 2000. In a world that can simultaneously be deterministic and unpredictable, the art of John Scott penetrates cultural ideology with a raw view of society and politics that has brought international attention to his work.

Maggie Broda: Thank you so much for spending this time with me. We both graduated from OCAD in the seventies. It was an interesting time for art in Canada. I've read that when you arrived in Toronto from your home in Windsor Ontario in the mid sixties you had no aspirations to become an artist. I also know that you are considered an excellent draftsman/painter. Most artists recognize some talent quite early. How did you learn to draw?

John Scott:

I suppose you could say I taught myself by doodling. I doodled all the time when I was young but I didn't think of myself as an artist. My sister was really good, she was the artist. I thought of myself as a writer really.

M.B.: Beauty infused with harsh political relevance is how your work has been identified. I'd like to know what you consider to be the primary source of motivation for the unique style and imagery in your paintings?

J.S.: That's easy; I paint about survival, literally and culturally. The survival of humans



Image from the private collection of Sarah Diamond*

as a species, survival of our cultural growth and freedom that was being threatened by the fear of nuclear war in the sixties. My characters are symbolic of the ignorance that plagues us. We need to populate our environment with simple images that humanize the issues in order to understand and protect the natural world.

M.B.: Your paintings often place a tough message in a savage mode with non-traditional images that are as symbolic as they are unique and have been described as hybrid-human-animals. What do you consider to be the

most challenging thing you have done as an artist?

J.S.: The Trans Am Apocalypse was very demanding from a physical standpoint. It took few years to complete and was extremely labor-intensive, although I have created other pieces that have required substantial work. Probably that piece would be considered the most potent.



The Trans Am Apocalypse - Photo courtesy of The Toronto Star

M.B.: What themes do you consider to be integral to your painting?

J.S.: Again it has to be survival on every level. To tell the story in simple terms and give people a humanized rationale through the deconstruction of ideas. Then it becomes commonplace and, therefore, it is possible to face the world with less fear and greater knowledge.

M.B.: Historical observation, conversations about culture and social commentaries are all present in your work in a thought-provoking and chilling manner. What is currently developing in your studio?

J.S.: Well right at the moment my work is being featured at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario. That kind of show is quite demanding and requires a lot of energy. I still won't take a break as there is always something pressing me forward.

M.B.: How would you describe changes in the art scene in Toronto over the last few decades

J.S.: Artists have always populated the environment with images that humanize and protest. What has changed for artists is the use of digital imagery and the intensity brought on by the internet creating more ways for more people to keep their voices heard.

M.B.: In your role as an OCAD University faculty member what is the strongest message and advice you give your students?



J.S.: There is no over-arching rule or message for the students I teach. There are individual messages, a unique hand, a unique path. I respond to each of their needs one-on-one.

M.B.: My sincere thanks to you it has been a pleasure delving into your work.

If anyone wishes to see more work by John Scott visit the Nicholas Metivier Gallery in Toronto.

Image from private collection*