

LOCAL STORIES

Meet Debra Ann | Artist

September 7, 2021 · [Leave a reply](#)

We had the good fortune of connecting with Debra Ann and we've shared our conversation below.

Hi Debra, we'd love to hear about how you approach risk and risk-taking

The entire decision making process of starting your own business — particularly as an artist — is risky. There are no guarantees you will make enough to even pay the bills, let alone really be successful. Artists have a precarious balance. On one hand many artists, myself absolutely included, find it difficult to do anything else. The prospect of going to a 9 to 5 job was always untenable. Early on though, of course, I had no choice but to work outside jobs, jobs I hated in the insurance industry in the midwest as a typist or file clerk. Once I moved to San Francisco in 1990 I found myself pretty much unemployable. Through sheer determination I was lucky and got hired as a freelancer doing graphic design and CD-ROM authoring work at home. At that point the internet was taking off so I learned HTML coding and created my first websites and created businesses. I've

not had a “regular” job since then. I had no idea where that would take me, but it worked out nicely eventually. It’s scary to think about how things could have gone in other directions.





Let's talk shop? Tell us more about your career, what can you share with our community?

My art has evolved over the years but always has maintained its roots in Dada and modern art. I feel like after 30 years of abject struggle I'm finally at a place where I truly enjoy what I do and I have confidence in my work. This is difficult for a lot of artists. The constant self-doubt sits there in the background ready to

pounce at the most inopportune times. In the 1980s I created underground experimental noise music and was 1/2 of a cassette music label. I continued to make music into the 1990s and various notable underground labels at the time released my music. Being solitary and shy, I was into recording but not performing. I've always enjoyed graphic art and was the one who designed all of the cassette label artwork, catalogs, and ads by hand with paste up methods.

Once I got a Mac computer in 1994 (Quadra 900 – 25 MB of RAM!!) my life changed. I quickly realized the computer would make my life easier and open up opportunities. It certainly did. I learned HTML, Photoshop, and CD-ROM authoring (too bad that's completely outdated), and viewed the internet as the new wild west of possibilities. Luckily I also greatly enjoyed all of it right from the start. I recall being in a Mac store and I started playing around with Photoshop and my reaction immediately was. "ooohhhh, THIS is what I want to do!"

Today as Atomic Mobiles I create kinetic art sculptures, stabiles, mobiles, and have embraced mid century modern and 1970s retro aesthetics and I still absolutely love doing graphic design. I design my work in Photoshop and Illustrator and I do all my own design for my websites, ads, and social media. I see my art as a modern extension of the Dada influence. Actually, though hanging art mobiles are considered "mid century", they have their roots in Dada. Marcel Duchamp and Hans (Jean) Art coined the phrases "mobiles" and "stabiles" for their friend, the founder of mobiles Alexander Calder.

Was it easy? Oh my. Nothing has ever been easy. In addition to dysfunction, I grew up in poverty, and was determined to overcome that and not let that be my life. I have a crazy sense of determination, I think that was the only way out for me. Never be afraid of change, always be open to evolving creatively, but also never stop, always find a way, a solution, a new idea.

If you had a friend visiting you, what are some of the local spots you'd want to take them around to?

I love love love the Museum of Jurassic Technology.

And of course the ocean, Griffith Park, jazz at LACMA on Friday nights (I hope that will come back soon!). I live in Highland Park and it has a great creative, open minded, vibe that I love. Because of the pandemic we've lost some great restaurants and shops, unfortunately. I haven't hung out anywhere outside my home in over a year, but that is slowly changing. My home is an interesting place, I always give visitors little tours of all the art I have hanging all over the place, the big succulent garden in the back, and my studio which is cram-packed with art and ideas.





The Shoutout series is all about recognizing that our success and where we are in life is at least somewhat thanks to the efforts, support, mentorship, love and encouragement of others. So is there someone that you want to dedicate your shoutout to?

I think a common thread in the lives of artists is the feeling of not fitting in, the feeling of isolation and doing things differently. Quite often this is not

understood or embraced by one's family or loved ones. My family was American Dysfunctional. I took on a do-it-yourself philosophy early on, by necessity. I realized no one was going to pull me up but myself. I gained a lot of inspiration from books and discovered Dada in my teens from spending hours at the public library pouring over art books. Somehow I related to the concept of nonsense in the world, and in the art it mirrored. Despite my mom's difficult time in her life, she always instilled in me a sense of fight, and always encouraged me to do try to do big things.

Website: <https://AtomicMobiles.com>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/atomicmobiles/>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/modernartmobiles>

Other: https://www.pinterest.com/atomicmobiles/_shop/ Also, my art/writing site: <https://www.chanceprocess.com/>

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Debra Ann / AtomicMobiles

Nominate Someone: ShoutoutLA is built on recommendations and shoutouts from the community; it's how we uncover hidden gems, so if you or someone you know deserves recognition please let us know [here](#).
