

VISIONARY ART

The Art of Jonathan Glass

BY DEEANNA FRANKLIN
Associate Editor

Most artists consider their art works to be very personal statements about themselves. Often, they use their art to say things they can't verbalize or as a means of making sense of their feelings about the world around them.

Jonathan Glass, who is 31, uses his drawings for his most personal expressions, and his photography offers an artistic outlet without the same intimate involvement.

Mr. Glass, who has always excelled at figure drawing, earned a degree in illustration. He often feels that he really has to know a person before he draws him or her. Several of his works are sketches of close friends and colleagues. While his drawings are often intensely personal expressions, photography allows him to put some distance between himself and bad events taking place in his life. Nonetheless, he approaches photography with the same meticulous care he applies to his drawings.

Mr. Glass was diagnosed with depression and schizophrenia during his senior year of college; it was later determined that he has schizoaffective disorder. Mr. Glass, an ambitious artist, is keenly aware of how his ability to create is tied to his medication and his physical health. He prizes his connection to Fountain House in New York City. His work has been exhibited at the Fountain House Gallery, including a two-person show earlier this year called "Chasing the Light," with painter Amy Koy.

Meanwhile, Mr. Glass continues to expand his horizons. He's been writing a lot of poetry lately and recently discovered a love of salsa dancing classes. ■



Charlie Parker Festival, ink on paper, 2004



Man, oil on canvas, 2002

IMAGES COURTESY JONATHAN GLASS

The Artist's Reflections

I was raised in Westchester County, N.Y.—Pleasantville, to be exact. I've been interested in art since I was 8 years old. At 10 years old, I took a pastel class and learned to draw still lifes with pastels. I would spend 40 hours on one pastel. There were times in my life when my parents thought I had [attention-deficit disorder] but never once did I have trouble concentrating when I was drawing. When I was 6 or 7, I would spend 3 hours on the book report covers and maybe 30 minutes on the book report.

My mom has a collection of all of my book covers. She's my biggest fan. My dad's supportive, too. I have an older brother, but let's not talk about him. I want to be his best friend, but it doesn't work that way. I think it's because of the dynamic of older brother—younger brother. I can talk to my brother about sports, but when it comes to art, he does not understand. He'll say, "I want to collect your stuff, 'cause it will be worth something when you're dead." I know he doesn't mean it; that's just his way of coming to grips.

In my senior year of college, I was handing in all of my illustration class assignments late, and I was starting to sleep 15-20 hours a day. This was 4 months after I had been said to have "mono." Four months later I was still sleeping 15-20 hours a day, and I called my mom and asked if I should see a therapist. She told me to wait, and they would get me a psychiatrist we know. My mom was very concerned, but she wanted me to hold off until after college. I was able to graduate, but barely. I went to the University of Buffalo. I took classes at the School of Visual Arts during the summers.

I took Prozac because I had mild depression after senior year. I went off my medication because the psychiatrist would fall asleep while I was talking to him (this was the same guy who was my parent's marriage counselor). I could only imagine what he did for them, and this was however many years after they got divorced? He put me on Prozac, and he had me see another doctor, a psychopharmacologist. We talked about childhood issues and my upbringing and how I needed to make new associations. He told me to read psychologists like Erik Erikson.

When I was in the hospital they labeled me with acute schizophrenia, but my diagnosis is now schizoaffective. They say once you have schizophrenia, your symptoms can come back. I had about five schizophrenic episodes in which I would hear voices, and have auditory experiences that would be heightened by my own sense of paranoia. I acted on one of them. I had a 3-day episode of living outside of my home and doing all these crazy things like going to my uncle and asking him for money to buy a tuxedo, because I thought I was supposed to get married. I busted up a fashion show, and I asked someone to marry me. I ran up on stage at a fashion show, and I pushed the MC out of the way, and I asked someone I knew to marry me. Not only was she surprised, I was surprised!

The cops arrested me for trespassing—twice. They took me to the hospital, and I was there for about a month. That was a traumatic experience. My parents were there every day. They came up from Florida. They stayed in my apartment, even

though they were soon to be divorced. They drove me crazy. I was the one in the hospital, and they were driving me crazy. They were very concerned. I know that even though my parents didn't have all the right answers, and didn't always do the right thing, I know that they care 100%. I feel blessed to have had two parents who through thick and thin I know are going to be there when I need them.

At first, in the hospital I was given Haldol, and that gave me splitting headaches, because it didn't work. I think I was put on Zyprexa next, and that's what I'm on now. The only thing is, within 3 weeks, I had gained 30 pounds. I've gained 80 pounds since I've been on Zyprexa. I used to weigh too little, so it's a good thing I gained some weight, but my eating habits are very hard for me to curb. There was a time after the hospital when I was unhappy with myself, and I went to the gym and lost a good amount of weight—like 20 pounds. So I know I can do it.

Right now having a job is very important. It's a source of stability for me. I work through Fountain House as a TEP, temporary employment position as a messenger at Newsweek. You're only supposed to work there 9 months total. They had me there 12 months because they knew I was such a hard worker. And I interviewed three times for jobs. The third time I figured I wasn't going to get it because I was so disappointed with the whole process, and they hired me that time. It reminded me of that scene in "The Shawshank Redemption" where Morgan Freeman's character says to the parole board: "Ah, you're not going to let me out. This is all crap." And the parole board gives him the okay. That's how it felt.

Movies definitely influence my photography, especially the noir films. What influenced me most in college was a Hitchcock class I took. I remember there was a time I was frustrated in every which way with it. I just thought there's something that I'm missing, and maybe if I looked at art and the great movies, and I looked at photography by Stieglitz, Walker Evans, and André Kertész, I could understand what it is I want and need to be taught.

When I first did photography it was to get away from the personal investment that drawing demanded; [it was] a way to escape the more personal aspects of my work. I felt that I needed to distance myself from a lot of things that were happening. I had a friend who was dying of cancer around that time, and my parents were getting divorced. All of these things were happening, so I took a photography class. It was a way to observe closely, and it was personal, but I didn't have to get so involved ... it was an art form for me, but it didn't have to be about my life.

I can't paint at home because I own a co-op in Manhattan, and having toxic chemicals is against the rules. I needed an outlet, and the Art Students League provides that. I try to sketch every day; I get a free class there in exchange for working in the cafeteria. I've been there about 5 years. It feels great to have an artistic outlet and a job that makes me feel like I have the ability to be upwardly mobile.

As told to Deeanna Franklin by Jonathan Glass.