

## **In Joan Belmar's Studio**

"Where does Art come from?" Asks Joan himself...

"At some point, someone needed to leave a print on a wall and tell a story. It is human, a humankind necessity" he says referring to the first graphics at the Altamira Caverns in Santander.

Joan Belmar moved from his native Chile to Ibiza-Spain in 1995. It was there where he met Emilio Botin, the grandchild of the women who discovered the caverns as a girl- he tells. This event inspired Joan's art at that moment and his painting developed with the mystery and profoundness of these ancient spaces.

Joan's work- in his words- has relation to history. "I am very playful"- he says, "I like to tell two stories at once through my work. One is personal, which I keep private, and the other one, is for the viewer's interpretation".

Part of his subject matter in some of his pieces is the extermination of the Chilean Indigenous people in past centuries. "They used to have their faces painted with dots, I paint those dots, but I make the body disappear theoretically. Inside these painted surfaces is the presence of what does not exist anymore".

"My background is in Graphic Design, but I rebelled to its stiffness, that is the reason why I started making art. Even though there is still a little bit of it, my paintings are freeing, like a dance between order and chaos. As an artist, one has to find a balance, I paint many layers, and I have to decide at some point what must be kept and what should be gone. It is like taking risks all the time, and learn to let go to be able to move on".

"I spend my day to day working in my studio. While there, I forget about everything and I enter a meditative state of creativity. I am not running after galleries anymore, like I used to as I arrived in Washington in the late 90's. At that time, I was not known at all, and it was very difficult to be represented by a gallery or to make connections. Since I started not putting that pressure on me anymore, and just focus on my work, to learn from other artists, attend exhibitions openings, etc. things started to change".

Nowadays, Joan's work is represented by three Galleries in the DC Metro area: Ada Rosa Bitterbaum Gallery, Addison/ Ripley Fine Art, and Charles Krause Reporting Fine Art Gallery. "I make different bodies of work or different series for each gallery. They all have their preferences. I am a very spoiled artist to be able to work with all three, but I don't like exclusivity. I am an artist, and if the galleries want to work with me, they must take it that way, it is fair for both of us."

He moves relaxed and takes a sit on his studio's floor, telling me his story like an old friend. Joan has that charismatic presence. A well-known DC artist, Manon Cleary must have seen that. Joan refers to her with extreme respect, mentioning her support of his work and encouragement for him to participate in different exhibitions. "She said what she was thinking about, her mind was open; it is very important that someone believes in you and your art when you're starting out in

a new place. I truly like people that are engaged with art. Even now, where social media pages such as Facebook can help artists to promote their art. Connections are important. I respect that.”

Another influential artist in Joan’s work is Tara Donovan, a Brooklyn based artist “Tara’s work inspired me in the usage of her materials, which she manipulates.

He wanted to make something “unusual” as he arrived to Washington DC. Using Mylar in his work was more “a necessity to explore something different to sculpture and painting”. “I started to build 3D pieces, tried acetate and other materials. It developed as part of my body of work, but I don’t like to be identified to any material, it is a trap, and you can find yourself categorized for it. I don’t like classifications of any kind, neither gender, raze, gay, masculine, feminine nor Latino or any kind of placement. I don’t belong anywhere!” –he laughs- “ I am from planet Earth”.

“Now I am into painting, recovering the colors of earth, I like Black, Red and Ochre. The dots are a way to evade the square form. They represent the moment, are meditative, dot over dot. Actually there are always two of them!” - He laughs- “It is order in chaos.”

Before leaving the idyllic surroundings of Joan’s studio at the backyard of his home in Takoma, I asked him about the relation to music and his work. While talking to him, music was constantly playing in the background.

“Music is very important to me and to my work. Each series of paintings belong to a specific kind of music. Even though it is impossible to recreate a piece, music takes me to the creative moment of each one, and it is like a bubble on time. Books and traveling are very important as well. To develop as an artist, one must get out of one’s comfort zone, look for new things, to be informed what is happening in the world, to get to know other cultures, etc. Otherwise, you will always stay behind...”

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Berlin, 8/2015