

## *The Write Place At the Write Time*

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### *Special Edition Art & Soul Interviews*



"Ocean" by Patti Dietrick; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pattidietrick/>

*About this image: "This is a photograph I took in 1998 at Corona Del Mar beach in California while working on a series of Tarot images of family members for a fine arts degree. She represented 'The World' although this is one of the outtakes from the roll." —PD*

### ***Featured interviews:***

Justin Elswick of Sleepthief  
Lynne Perrella, Mixed Media Artist  
Dan Reeder of Gourmet Paper Mache

## *Interview with Justin Elswick of Sleepthief*



The Dawnseeker album art illustrated by Daniel Solen, designed by Brian Son;  
<http://sleepthiefmusic.com/>

*"She walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies; / And all that's best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes" —Lord Byron, "She Walks in Beauty"*

*At nocturnal crossroads of myth and truth, emotion and intellect, fantasy and reality, past and present, there is a Sleepthief stealing our hearts to wake us to dreaming.*

*Pairing "all that's best of dark and bright" romanticism with ethereal sound and contemporary innovation, Sleepthief, the musical project of writer/composer Justin Elswick, transports listeners into symbolic realms where the emotive stories that unfold there prompt them to uncover their own. Just as in a dream, there is self-recognition in resonant words, sentiment and images. Doors are thrown open to personal interpretation. With an ardent fanbase expressing their intimate connections to the songs, it would seem fair to say that this music is felt as much as it is heard.*

*Though the storytelling thread for the individual songs extending to the videos and cover art maintains an artistic consistency, the content is infused with variety. Whether in ancient Greece, a Renaissance forest, the desert, the 80s à la Duran Duran, upon a foreign shore or a futuristic domestic battlefield, the listener—or dreamer—can dream themselves anew track by track.*

*Comprised of electronic, ambient, Celtic, classical, pop and world music elements, Sleepthief celebrates the alchemy of powerful combinations. This is further illustrated by the individuals who have collaborated with this music project including established vocalists Jody Quire, Joanna Stevens, Coury Palermo, Kirsty Hawkshaw, Zoë Johnston, Caroline Lavelle, Harland, Nicola Hitchcock, Kyoko Baertsoen, Roberta Carter Harrison, san.drine, Mirabilis, Suzanne Perry, Jerri Eckert, Lauren Edman, Janna Thompson Ellsworth; guitarists Josh Aker and Vic Levar; and co-producer Israel Curtis. A number of the vocalists have also worked with groups such as Delerium, BT, Balligomingo, Radiohead and Wild Strawberries.*

*Having released several critically and commercially successful albums in addition to his work as an attorney and his passions for history and philosophy, Justin Elswick has been aptly deemed a Renaissance man. Elswick received a B.A. degree in History from Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah and a Masters of Philosophy from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, before receiving his Juris Doctorate degree from the J. Reuben Clark School of Law at Brigham Young University.*

Interview with Justin Elswick by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) There are elements of art in all aspects of Sleepthief—from the music to the album images to the music videos. Talk to us about what goes into your extensive individual creative role as well as that of the wonderful people you collaborate with to maintain consistency with a story thread from a particular song's inception to the final video release and cover art.

***I have always had a very strong aesthetic sense when it comes to visuals, sound, and general conveyance of a concept or idea. I believe my natural aesthetic predilections veer toward romanticism and classicism. When writing music, I find that the seed of the song always stems from some sort of emotion. That emotion can be inspired by personal events in my life, or in the lives of people I know, by films, literature, scenery, history, or myriad other sources. Once that emotion is captured to my satisfaction in the form of a melody that I have played on piano, I will then begin the process of layering different textures (strings, percussion, synths, etc.) until the song is at least somewhat “fleshed out.”***

***Once that is accomplished, I select the singer that I want to be involved with that particular track and then explain the impetus for the song. It is essential for me that the singers I work with understand the core emotional foundation (or the inspiration) for the song.***

***To take a recent example, I had a situation occur several years ago where someone that I loved very much ended up hurting me more deeply than I'd ever been hurt before. I felt betrayed and cast aside, and I wanted to write a song about that need we often feel when hurt to “get back” at the person who hurt us. I am not saying that this is a noble sentiment, but it was a very real one that I was feeling. Although I never actually did anything to “get back” at the person in question, all of the emotion behind my feelings were poured into the song “This Means War.” It is a song about being manipulated and easily disposed of even after giving your heart to someone. It is also about confronting that person and showing them that you are***

***not weak. After I wrote the music for “This Means War,” I actually wrote lyrics for it as well.***

***After finishing the lyrics, the idea came to me to shoot a video based upon a couple who is in “combat” mode in their relationship. However, instead of physically taking out their aggressions, they do battle through surrogate androids.***

***I often find that the central idea for a song can often be expanded when it is presented in a video form to convey a more general or even tangential aspect of the original idea. Similarly, with respect to artwork, I find that my album art and photography is a natural outgrowth of the original song (or songs in the case of my full album artwork) or even the album title itself. For example, with The Dawnseeker artwork, the image of the ship in the darkness with some select illumination was a very apt representation of the title of the album (i.e. a ship emerging in a sense from darkness into light). In any case, I have found that the visual aspects of my artwork and videos have become as important to my overall image and style as the music itself. I think it is very important as an artist to create an “ambience” or overarching “theme” that listeners can identify with.***

2) In discussing Belgian-born French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar, the first woman elected to the Académie française, you included in a list of favorite quotes from her works: “The mask, given time, comes to be the face itself.” Masks figure in both the “Eurydice” and “Skipping Stones” videos as symbolic separations from the living world. If masks can replace individual identity, metaphorically detaching people from daily life, can it be posited that through the opposite of metaphoric death, through creation (in this instance referring to one’s art), that masks are removed? Orpheus uses music to try and recover Eurydice from Hades. It is often said that authors reveal the truth and themselves through their fiction.

In the words of Nobel Prize-Winning author Gao Xingjian, “It’s in literature that true life can be found. It’s under the mask of fiction that you can tell the truth.”

Virginia Woolf wrote that “[e]very secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works.” Writers

and artists have made self-discoveries, received personal revelation while in process and also learned the meaning of their subject following its creation through the reactions/feedback of their audience. Their creative works serve as a vehicle to discover or communicate underlying layers beneath consciously known or unknown masks. In this sense, concerning your involvement with various aspects of the music (ex. writing, production, performance), have you ever discovered something unexpected about yourself, been able to cathartically communicate a personal experience or learned what the true personal purpose of a piece was after completion by way of feedback from listeners?

***Absolutely. In fact, I think the two songs that I have received the most feedback on and had the most emotional response to are “Skimming Stones” and “Reason Why.” Interestingly, these are the two songs that are most drawn from my own inner struggles, passions and fears. I have told people on various occasions that my music speaks my “truest” language and that writing music allows me to abandon any and all of my carefully constructed facades and to express myself with absolute candor. With those two songs, in particular, my deepest sentiments seem to have been communicated strongly to listeners; and the feedback on those songs from fans always seems related to their own very personal battles and losses and triumphs.***

***I find it incredibly affecting and affirming that a stranger from the other side of the planet could hear a song that most profoundly reveals my heart and understand, and relate to me through the medium of music.***

***Conversely, there are times when the “mask” is quite enjoyable to wear for purposes of writing a song. I think of it as somewhat akin to acting. When I wrote “Tenuous,” I was inspired by the laments that are part and parcel of much of the Irish and Scottish historical folk repertoire. Many of those songs have to do with the loss of a spouse or family member due to accidents at sea or because of war. When conceiving the idea behind “Tenuous” I imagined what it would be like to be a woman in a small village hundreds of years ago who discovered that her husband had died at sea. I visualized the grief and the loss that such an experience would cause and I could actually see in my***

***mind's eye what it would be like to feel this “husband’s” presence on lonely nights—as though he was aching to return home and to be embodied once again if only to comfort his loved one.***

3) There appear to be some elements of romanticism in the music, their accompanying videos and the philosophy of your approach. Fans have drawn parallels to the Bronte brand of dark romanticism with the song/video “Tenuous”. Tragic love, appearing in certain selections from both *The Dawnseeker* and *Labyrinthine Heart* albums, is almost evocative of Poe’s ‘love lost’ sentiments. Emphasis on originality, quality over fame/formula pursuits, women (lead vocals), mythical historic settings, and in keeping with the notion of German painter Caspar David Friedrich that “the artist’s feeling is his law,” a strong emotional focus in the songs.

Whether you’re writing the music, melody and lyrics or sending the music to a vocalist to work on the latter, you’d said in an interview that you’ve spoken in depth with each of the vocalists about your “feelings” behind the music. You’ve also mused about the conflicts between the “heart (emotional) and the brain (rational)” on social media. Powerful backdrops of nature with imagery sometimes conjuring an impression of the later “modern Pre-Raphaelite” world of John William Waterhouse with gown-wearing maidens or mythical Grecian themes often feature in the music videos. Do you feel a particular pull toward the Romantic period and some of its ideology as an influence or are these parallels creatively coincidental?

***You have really hit the nail on the proverbial “head” with this question. My favorite period of art is the Pre-Raphaelite period and most of the literature I read is either “classic” Victorian-period literature or literature set in past historical periods (e.g. A. S. Byatt, Marguerite Yourcenar, Mary Renault, Sharon Kay Penman).***

***As a child, my very first book (which my mother gave to me) was titled Gods and Men of Ancient Greece. So, I think from quite a young age, I was drawn to the larger questions (as I perceived them) of life. For me, the questions of existence, suffering, passion, death, loyalty, and even the supernatural are the most relevant and inspiring (although elusive) questions to be explored during this life. I am truly less interested in the latest iPhone technology than I am with***



***understanding why humans experience precognition or the nature of dreams and the subconscious. While we have become a “tech” society, I find that history, philosophy and art still seem to feed the soul of humankind far more than binary systems.***

***I have always been given to “flights of fancy” as well. It is very easy for me to visualize natural scenery, a moment between two lovers, a desolate or hopeful scene. Because my emotions can easily be associated with an imaginary sequence or “story” in my head, I think it is easier for me to write songs that stem from those purely imagined stories. That being said, I have tried to also practice writing songs that are inspired by events in my own life. In order for that to happen successfully, though, I have found that the event must make a serious impact on my life to jumpstart the writing process.***

4) You’ve mentioned being moved by music and the rewarding feeling of feedback from listeners who were moved by your music, it being akin to “discovering a bunch of new friends that ‘get’ what you are about.” Much like Hawthorne’s sentiment about those readers who will truly know and understand the author. On social media, you often pay-it-forward, so to speak, by sharing and celebrating the music you find of new artists or artists outside the mainstream with your followers. I’ve discovered a number of new favorites to be moved by through these recommendations.

Ever moved and inspired by the written word personally and professionally, we at the publication have our diverse tastes in classic, lesser known and emerging authors. We love discovering new writers and sharing their work with our readers. Yet the artistic medium of music, the sensory experience and enjoyment of it, has always been another passion for me. When writing, I gather songs into a ‘soundtrack’ and can see stories begin to unfold as though they were scenes from a film. I can be profoundly affected by music and see it not only as one of the muses, but also a force by which I personally recharge, feel the extremes of emotions and define them.

Beyond your musical influences and inspirations, is the written word (in terms of literature, mythology) your outside artistic medium that affects/feeds the music, moves you and serves as a personal way to recharge? A number of the authors you discuss combine elements of history, ancient Greece, and surreal qualities to address contemporary or

philosophical issues/themes. Sleepthief's music often addresses timeless themes including love and loss with a combination of Greek myths, contemporary electronica and surreal qualities woven into historic period settings in videos.

***I am a lover and fan of music. So, it is always a treat for me to recommend other artists or music that I am currently listening to. It's similar with books or films—if I find something that appeals to me, I want to share it with anyone I can.***

***Other than music, reading is my other principal passion in life. I am a voracious reader, and always have been. As a small child, I can remember always rising at 6:00 a.m. (even on the weekends), picking up a book and stretching out and reading on my parents' sofa until my siblings or parents woke up. I recall the intense pleasure reading gave me (and still does). I think some of my first books were fantasy or myth-themed. For example, The Prydain Chronicles by Lloyd Alexander was one of my favorites for many years and I re-read that series several times. I loved Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. And then I read the Dune series while in junior high school by Frank Herbert (although looking back, I don't know that I grasped all of the complex themes of that series). Of course, reading The Lord of the Rings in high school was a watershed experience for me.***

***As I matured, I began to read the classics (e.g. Dickens, Emily Bronte, Austen) and I also developed an interest in ancient Greek and Roman history. When I entered college, I studied for a B.A. in History—which aligned perfectly with my interests. Eventually, I began reading authors like Umberto Eco, John Fowles, Sandor Marai, David Liss, Charles Palliser, Iain Pears, Steven Pressfield, John Crowley and the like.***

***Those novelists have certainly contributed to my emotional and conceptual palette from which I draw ideas for songwriting.***

5) You strike a balance in defining and maintaining Sleepthief's musical style and also infusing albums/releases with fresh ingenuity. Whether in ancient Greece, a Renaissance forest, the desert, the 80s ala Duran Duran, a different continent with the beautiful language of san.drine or a futuristic

domestic battlefield as in “This Means War”, the audience goes on a variety of journeys. Can you give us a backstage pass in terms of where we can look forward to going next with Sleepthief? (Upcoming projects/albums/releases...)

*The big project at the moment is finishing up the third full-length album. At this point, there are 7 tracks completed, but I am expecting the album to have at least 14 tracks, so I am about halfway completed. The new album features some of the singers I've worked with in the past (Jody Quine, Kirsty Hawkshaw, Zoë Johnston, Caroline Lavelle, Suzanne Perry, Coury Palermo, Kyoko Baertsoen, Kristy Thirsk, Joanna Stevens) as well as several artists that I have not collaborated with before (Phildel, Jill Alikas, Julia Beyer, and Sonja Drakulich).*

*So far, the album is sounding a bit like a combination of my first two albums with some twists. Of course, I want the music to appeal to all of the current fans, but it is also important for me to explore new areas and soundscapes. I definitely think this will be my strongest album to date.*

*Once I finish the third album, I am going to be finalizing the project I did with Caroline Lavelle and Israel Curtis called “Spythriller.” We have a full album of songs recorded, but we just need to finish the arrangement and programming. Also, I want to release a full-length winter/Christmas album in 2016.*

*In short, I have plenty of exciting things to look forward to musically-speaking! I also plan on releasing at least one more music video for the new album and I already have a concept laid out. The video will be for the song “Andromache” which will be on the forthcoming Sleepthief album.*

*Thank you so much for this wonderful chance to respond to such thought-provoking questions. And my thanks again to anyone who has listened to my music and supported me. As a fully independent artist, it is the listeners who keep me inspired to write and produce.*



Justin Elswick photo; image credit,  
Gitte Meldgaard

#### Additional Links:

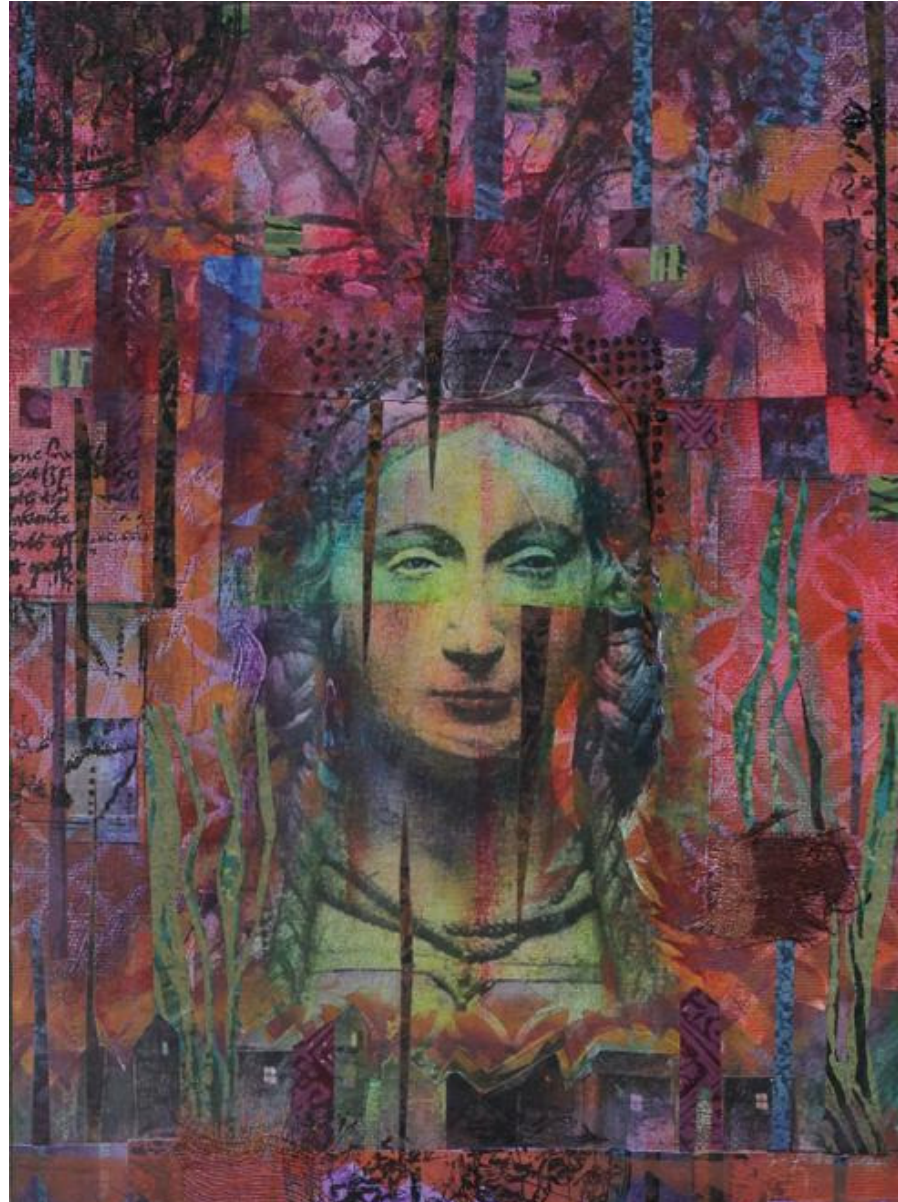
<http://www.cdbaby.com/Artist/Sleepthief>  
<https://www.facebook.com/sleepthiefofficialfb>


*Editor's Note: This song was how I was first introduced to Sleepthief. The video you are about to see uses visual symbolism to tell the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. To give a very basic version of the Greek myth, Eurydice was the beloved wife of Orpheus. On their wedding day, Orpheus played joyful music as she danced through the meadow. Stepping upon a viper, she was bitten and died instantly. Using music to portray his intense grief, Orpheus swayed the gods to allow him to venture to the Underworld to retrieve his wife, persuading Hades to let him do so. He was warned that he must walk in front of Eurydice and not turn to look backward until they had reached the threshold of the living world. Suddenly seized with doubt about whether she was still behind him or truly there, Orpheus turned to look at her. Eurydice was pulled back into the Underworld. Their souls were later reunited upon the untimely demise of Orpheus.*

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurydice>



*Interview with Lynne Perrella, Mixed Media Artist*





*In a room of vibrant paint, colored pencils, paper, journals and stencils...sunflowers, parasols, statues...prints, books, thread, music and found objects, one imagines they would themselves be found.*

*A gardener of imagery, Lynne Perrella grows fresh, blossoming concepts from heirloom seeds of items, words, locales and photographs fortunate enough to be harvested by her vision. These dazzling blooms are arranged in a way that transcends their ornamental appeal, giving generously of the beauty-filled mind of the gardener herself. Wise perspectives shared, spread viewer to viewer, pollinating imaginations...*

*Elevating her influences and inspirations through striking colors, patterns and textures, Perrella visits figures from Chaucer to Kalo to Kerouac, to those of her own ancestry. Her modes of expression include journals, fine art, assemblage and illustration.*

*Perrella graduated from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and began a career as a commercial artist. In 1970, she co-founded Perrella Design, Inc. with her husband, John. She worked as an illustrator and designer for over thirty years. Her interest in Correspondence art led her to create Acey Deucey, a rubber stamp company. Pursuing a continued fascination with paper arts, Perrella worked in collage and assemblage. She was selected to serve on the editorial advisory board of two publications—Somerset Studio and Somerset Memories. She gives workshops throughout the US and abroad, contributes frequent articles to a number of paper arts magazines and has authored five books on mixed media. These include Art Making, Collections & Obsessions, Artists' Journals & Sketchbooks, Alphabetica, Beyond Paper Dolls and Art Making & Studio Spaces. Her artwork appears in twenty-six books. Read more on the Artists' Gallery page.*

Interview with Lynne Perrella by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) In a 2011 edition of *Somerset Studio* magazine, you wrote of the origins and inspirations behind your *Canterbury Tales* series. You described Chaucer, the author, as an “inveterate storyteller and observer of humanity.” Similarly, artists tell stories in their compositions of what they observe of humanity. Both writers and artists work from life in the sense

that they absorb their cumulative experiences, witnessed/processed external occurrences, emotions, memories, sensory encounters and allow these to inform their imaginations. When inspiration is drawn from another art form, there would seem to be not only a mixing of mediums, but a blending of perspectives and world views; dramatic fusion creating a new story. Within this visually captivating group of panels, what elements of the characters have been heightened/accentuated, added or altered based on your personal creative interpretations of Chaucer's true meaning?

***Collage is a very spontaneous and free-wheeling art form—and inspiration can come from almost anywhere. An overheard song lyric, colors of a postage stamp, a field of yarrow, odd things rattling around in the back of a drawer in my studio. There's no "formula" or predictable pathway to finding the next great idea—and that suits me fine. A great work of literature (like The Canterbury Tales, for instance) can trigger endless ideas, and since my art form is relatively alternative, there are no boundaries, no dictums, and no limits.***

***The prospect of interpreting some of Chaucer's characters was both exhilarating and humbling. He provided the descriptive dossier—now it was my (self-assigned) job, to take over.***

***One of my first steps was to take a look at what previous artists had done; and the works of Rockwell Kent, Eric Gill, and others were inspiring. Research is always a favorite part of any project for me; and I discovered a long tradition of artists (both well-known and little-known) who had taken the Chaucer Challenge. There is a mythic partnership that occurs, when a visual artist "carries the banner" of the written word. I always think of it as a case of "fresh horses"—an ancient work of literature stands on its own, and then a new visual treatment comes along to infuse the stanzas with another layer of possibility. My collage of "The Wife of Bath" was the result of working with a photo I took of an ancient, enigmatic reliquary at The Cloisters. It was a spontaneous choice, and it felt right.***

2) Having been bequeathed "a lifelong fascination for classic literature" by a junior high school English teacher, what are some of the other classics that speak to you? Has this fascination contributed to your intrinsic sense of the formation and communication of character in your artwork? Your capacity



to leave the lingering impression of a story told in a piece (whether stemming from travel to France, local history or family history)?

***“Classics” is in the eye of the beholder; but I have especially enjoyed exploring the works of Shakespeare, Jack Kerouac, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. At first, they might seem like an odd bouquet of brilliant minds—but, in each case, they mastered the art of lavish, descriptive detail. They offered a banquet of telling details, welcoming the reader to become part of a different reality. Through their words, I have experienced trekking through verdant Arden Forest, carousing in the rainy back alleys of Lowell, Massachusetts, and coveting a “diamond as big as The Ritz”. The descriptions are the magic carpet—all I have to do is surrender to the words.***

***This often leads to the studio, where I take “the next step” and amplify the descriptions into visual form. As a collage artist, I don’t need to know what the result will be—in fact, Juan Gris memorably said “You are lost the moment you know the outcome”—but I can translate the inspiration from the page to my drawing table and prolong the enjoyment.***

3) You’ve written on your site that “[i]llustration is a realm where I can use my enthusiasm and fascinations to ‘tell a story’, and yet honor the viewer by letting them provide the ending.” In the vein of a viewer or a reader having a participatory role in written or visual works by getting to ‘provide the ending’ through imagination and/or interpretation, what do you feel the differences are in people’s ability to insert themselves into these mediums? Does the level of access differ one medium to another? Or do you feel that the individual can see themselves in a still visual work or a written character to an equal degree?

***In a lifetime, we are surrounded by so many images, words, theories, impulses, conflicts, pleasures. It can be overwhelming. It can make one feel over-saturated. I eventually realized that, as much as I enjoy abundance, I needed to heed my personal “dog whistle” and start paying attention to the images and words that really resonated deeply and make my brainstem wiggle. To me, this is a form of “personal curating”. I had the great pleasure of becoming acquainted with renowned assemblage artist, Melissa Zink, from Taos, New Mexico.***



***On the last page of one of her exhibition catalogs, she listed paragraph-after-paragraph of her “Influences”. In tiny type were names as diverse as Duke Ellington and Ellsworth Kelly. I totally understood her urge to “name” the people who had contributed to her artistic process, not leaving anyone out. To me, that is part of the privilege of having influences—to honor and elevate them.***

4) In honor of *Art Making and Studio Spaces*, a collection of visual essays on varied artists’ studios, tell us three things you believe from your findings are the most important to keep in mind for a sacred creative space (able to apply to visual or word artists).

***First and foremost, a studio space should be personal. Unapologetic. Whether ankle-deep in chaos (think: Frances Bacon), or mannerly and tidy, it must be a space that provokes action as well as reverie. Like a nest or burrow that is created day-by-day, by the inhabitant; the outcome should feel as natural as a second skin.***

***When I enter my studio, I feel the embrace of the space. It is mine alone. I adjust the lighting, the music; and begin pulling things out of drawers. If I decide to paint the walls of my art library “Bullseye Red”, it’s my choice. (I just did that.) An old wooden tool box sits on my drawing table, holding a gaggle of my favorite art supplies within reach. I use old-fashioned thumb tacks to post my favorite quotations, or passages, or reminders on the side of the box. One constant is “What we do today is what matters most.” A quote from the Buddha. Inspiration will come—but, first, we need to GO to the studio. Just go.***

## ***Interview with Dan Reeder of Gourmet Paper Mache***



Dan Reeder photo; image credit Bradford Bohonus

*The archetypal presence of the dragon, in all its majesty and force, has lurked in the lore of cultures across the world for centuries. Referred to as one of the symbols of the collective unconscious, the dragon is leaving the shadows of the cave for the modern day spotlight through the revolutionary methods of 'paper' mache artist, Dan Reeder.*

*According to Wikipedia, the expression, "Here be dragons" and its derivatives, is meant to convey dangerous and/or unexplored areas, referring to the "medieval practice of putting dragons, sea serpents and other mythological creatures" in the uncharted territories of maps. Reeder, with his ingenuity and sense of whimsy, takes us off the map into uncharted territory amongst monsters with personality—and sets the paper mache scene aflame.*

*Reeder has been creating his unique, non-traditional paper mache art for our four decades. His work has been displayed in fairs, galleries, and art museums. He published his first book in 1984, The Simple Screamer: A Guide to the Art of Papier and Cloth Mâché, featured in USA Today. It was in print for over twenty-five years and sold around the world. Its success led to two sequels, the most recent being Papier Mâché Monsters: Turning*

*Trinkets and Trash into Magnificent Monstrosities. He has also written a book specifically for his dragon fans. Paper Mache Dragons details the making of dragons and dragon trophies. His site, Gourmet Paper Mache currently ranks number one on the Top 100 Craft Sites Report. Read more on the Artists' Gallery page.*

Interview with Dan Reeder by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) You discuss on your site the phenomenon of the fantastical presence of the dragon being present in the lore of cultures all over the world, embedded in the human psyche. These imaginary creatures have appeared in various forms as archetypes in myths and belief systems across time and continents. Carl Jung referred to dragons as one of the symbols of the collective unconscious. Though their meaning differs by culture, a universal attribute often ascribed to them is one of transition. They hold dualities of different connotations, but in the end, are a means of passage for growth, rebirth, and in the hero's quest, formative darkness leading to light.

Your whimsical creations, blending dark and light, symbolic gravity and levity, cover a spectrum of portrayals of this archetype. What does the dragon personally mean to you and how did it become a great muse inspiring the stories of each finished product? Were there books/films/paintings of the symbol that fed your early inspiration?

***I love the notion of a beast that exudes unbridled power, one that would be the consummate hunter, that would occupy the very top of the food chain. I love the idea of a beast that can fly and spit fire. Then there is the really cool idea that humans and dragons might be able to coexist, even form mutually beneficial relationships. Some special humans might even train them, ride them. So much better than a horse! I just love dragons. I always have. I'm not exactly sure why or where it started. As a kid I enjoyed all stories that included dragons, in particular, Tolkien's The Hobbit. (More recently I've been taken with George R.R. Martin's series, A Song of Ice and Fire along with the attendant Game of Thrones TV series.)***

***As an adult I think I am clearer about my artistic fascination with dragons. As a sculptor, there is just so much possibility in the movements of a serpentine animal. So many ways to***

***capture that power I described, the “personality” of the dragon. Of course, since they are fantasy animals, I have complete license to make them any way I see fit. I can choose any color pallet, any kind of physical attribute. There is so much potential for making something downright beautiful. Of course there is an inherent contradiction in the depiction of a funny or whimsical dragon as well. The How to Train Your Dragon movies are built around it. So every so often I like to make a comical dragon. That same contradiction exists for baby dragons, another favorite theme of mine. All animal babies are cute, right? Even baby dragons!***

***Now maybe, deep down, I am really just trying to extend my own personal power by making dragons. But probably not. I think it’s fairly simple. I love dragons. And I make what I love. I’ll admit here that I actually have a dragon “problem.” That’s all I really want to make. I have to force myself to make a few non-dragon pieces in between my dragon projects just to show the versatility of the art form. But I’m usually thinking about dragons as I work on those other pieces.***

2) In our current issue, we explore the convergence of different mediums, examining their influences upon one another. When working on pieces inspired by other art forms, such as the commissions you’d done of comic villains for *Spawn* comic creator, Todd McFarlane, and the dragon pieces you’d made celebrating the Disney animated film version of the character Maleficent, are there any differences in your process as compared to making characters from scratch?

***There is a very big difference in the way I approach a piece of commissioned art than a piece I make for myself. The goal of the two commissioned pieces you mentioned was to capture the look, the feel, the essence of the characters I was re-creating. In both of those instances I was trying to bring to life, in three dimensions, characters that were born in two dimensions. That is a great challenge. It is a very hard thing to do well. Each drawing of *Spawn*, each frame in the movie *Sleeping Beauty* of *Maleficent*, changed slightly. I wasn’t re-creating just one image. To be successful, my sculptures had to look like those characters from every angle. They also had to capture the personalities of the original renditions. So each aspect of***

***process was more deliberate. Every proportion was analyzed. Every detail scrutinized with an eye on the original works.***

***In contrast, when I make a project for myself, I allow the piece to unfold more naturally. I don't plan as carefully. I trust that the art will grow itself. Of course that doesn't always happen. There are times in the middle of the process when I decide to change directions. You can see that in a couple of my videos. In my "Paper Mache Minotaur" video you can see an abrupt shift in how I wanted the face to look. I left that major alteration in the video to demonstrate the "forgiving" nature of this medium: ([http://youtu.be/Pwil6b4\\_DHU](http://youtu.be/Pwil6b4_DHU))***

***Making changes like this is something you can't do easily with clay or wood or stone. But for the most part, when I'm creating pieces for myself I just trust my instincts, my experience to grow the project. I love getting surprised. Sometimes a piece will seemingly jump out of me. One minute there is nothing; the next there is a dragon or some other creature staring at me. I encourage beginners to make a monster for this very reason. I tell them not to plan the project too carefully, to just let it evolve on its own. Making a creature that is not real allows for this kind of freedom. Invariably, if they follow my advice, they will get that element of surprise. No matter which approach I take, I still revel in the joy of creativity. And I believe that paper mache is supremely suited as a vehicle for self-expression.***

3) Seeing the time lapse videos and the incredible detail in your work, all the skills needed (those of a painter, sculptor and arts and craftsman), one wants to know—how did this process, including your innovative method involving cloth and glue come about? How did the process evolve as you went? What early artistic skills/interests/experiences led to Gourmet Paper Mache? Run us through an example of a project in terms of all that goes into it (time, effort, supplies, etc...).

***I started doing paper mache while teaching elementary school. As I've mentioned on my site, I had my fifth grade students make monsters so that their success would be guaranteed. No one could tell them that the horn was in the wrong place. I made monsters with them. As I did, I began to realize the potential of the medium. But success and innovation is mostly about***

*practice. I believe in that 10,000 hour rule (the premise of the book Outliers). I was always looking for ways to make the process easier for my students. That lead to some important innovations in technique, like using only large newspaper strips, and only putting your hands in the paste (no newspaper strips in the paste!).*

*But I think my most important contribution to the world of paper mache is the “skin” I add to my pieces. Traditional paper mache coatings tend to be brittle. One of the early frustrations we had in my classes was that the monsters would break. After all of the work put into the pieces someone would bump into a monster and break a finger or a horn. So I looked around the school and noticed that there was a lot of Elmer’s glue. It is used a lot in the elementary school. I had old bed sheets at my house and I experimented with tearing the sheets into strips, dipping them in glue and then adding it to a project for strength. It really worked beautifully. Since everyone sleeps on sheets it was easy for the kids to scrounge them. We started adding this skin to all of our monsters.*

*Aside from making the projects strong, I found that you could easily make details that are hard to achieve with paper alone. A square piece of cloth wrapped around a round object (like an eye) creates wrinkles naturally. Natural looking folds occur when you stuff a piece of cloth into a nostril or an eardrum. And, as I discovered later, this cloth and glue process made great dragon wings! I called the process “cloth mache” for a lack of a better term. It is term that I formally coined with the publication of my first book, The Simple Screamer: A Guide to the Art of Papier and Cloth Mache (1984, Gibbs Smith Publishers).*

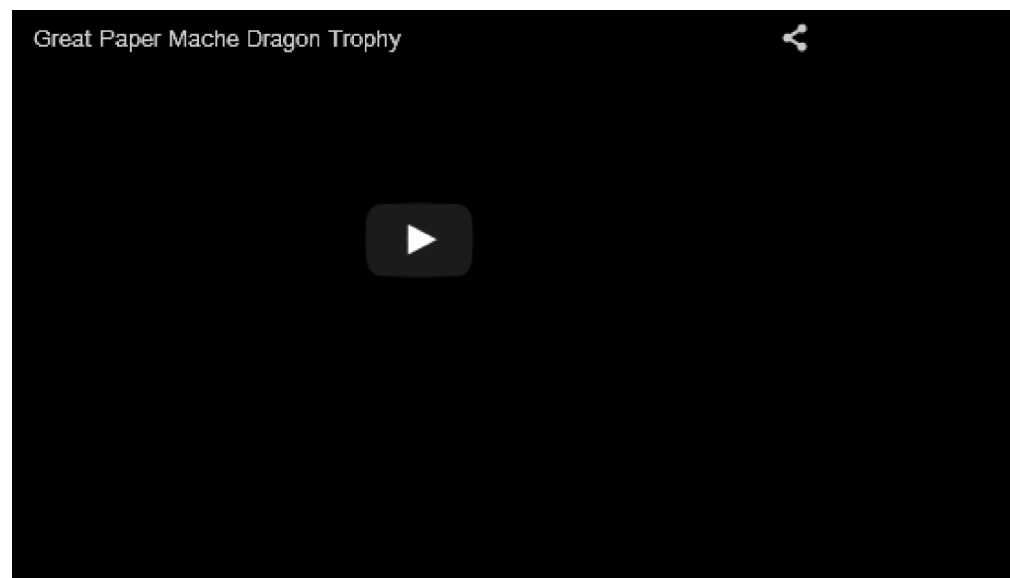
*Today I make my projects pretty much the way we made them in my elementary classroom so many years ago. I crumple paper and make basic “body” shapes, like bodies, heads, arms and legs. I add paper mache to these parts. Once dry, I sculpt with these pieces by cutting them up and using masking tape. I add the cloth mache skin after that. Then I paint. It’s fairly simple and straight forward so far as process is concerned. Of course the level of detail is what sets some projects apart from*

***others. Even though the process is simple, the projects can be extremely labor intensive. But I like the work. It “feeds” me the right way.***

***The truth is that, as I said in an earlier answer, I learned what I learned as I went. Every project I make uses experience I acquired from every project that went before. For example, once I started using black washes, other color washes made sense. Over time I developed an almost intuitive sense about proportion. But it really isn't intuition. It's memory. I'm a better sculptor now than I was 20 years ago. That's because I have made many dozens of projects over that time. And I've never formally studied art technique. In some ways that has made me more adventurous I think. I don't know when I'm doing something wrong. I just know whether I like a piece or not when I'm done. Luckily, this is a very "forgiving" medium. If I don't like something I've done, I just change it.***

***Thank you for this opportunity to share.***

Editor's Note: As mentioned on the home page, we first discovered Dan through one of these videos and wished to share with you the amazingly elaborate process we watched unfold. See a fiery, majestic creature born into life at the hands of an artist!



\*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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