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FINE ART REIMAGINED WITH DKDESIGNFINEART

MARINA DOJCHINOV JANUARY 15, 2019

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Derrick Shawn Grant is the founder and brainchild behind DKDesignFineArt. Specializing in multimedia, digital and graphic design, Grant combines his love of fashion and art into one medium. He has developed a unique methodology called *Grantique* which seeks to involve the observer into the story of what is being created. His background is scientific, with Grant earning a PhD in both

Anatomy and Biology. Grants' surrealist style combined with digital aspects create an intense visual effect through his work.

How did you get into the arts, and tell us about your background...

I have always been interested in art and pursued it from the age of 7; to the chagrin of my parents. I always kept a sketch pad with me where I could draw. At the age of 5, I remember holding a crayon and staring at a leaf for four or five minutes, observing every curve before attempting to draw it. All at the same time, while drawing, I was distracted by the beautiful aroma of the old fashion crayon (which was still made of old wax at the time). When I was a little older, I had a passion for the color chart and rainbows and would line up the box of 64 crayons, in order to just admire the color pattern. Nothing excited me more than opening a box of pencil crayons in grade school. During the rest of grade school and high school, I spent much of my time doodling on my books and drawing islands and entire communities that I would eventually build (something like the game SimCity does in recent years). I then developed a keen sense of space and how it interacted with objects in a 3d plane so I took a drafting class in high school. I still have a fascination for 3d space which is repeatedly seen in my paintings.

You have a PhD in Anatomy and Cell Biology, has that scientific background played into the way you create and view art?

Yes my education in University, especially regarding human Anatomy and Biology, has greatly enhanced the way I paint and organize human and inanimate objects in the scene of my art pieces. Knowing the details of every muscle and bone in the body has helped me to understand the natural flow and movement of the human body and value the human form and not the ornamentation of clothing or paraphernalia that humans adorn themselves with. As mentioned above my choice of career was heavily influenced by my mother. When I was graduating high school, I told my parents that I wanted to study Art and History in University, but they would not allow that. At that time, the only choices that were available to someone from my family was the Medicine or

Legal profession. Frustrated, I decided to become a doctor like my Mother wanted, but clandestinely I took as many art (painting, drawing, design) and history classes as I could in college. I came out with a PhD in Medicine and Anatomy and Cell biology in Montreal Canada. Over the past years the art that interests me the most is the Renaissance or art from the period of the 1490s to 1560s, due to its humanistic expression. I feel that this humanist art truly explored our primitive and social nature in beautiful ways. I also enjoy modern artists that employ the techniques of Renaissance artists in new and modern ways; Roberto Ferri does this in his beautiful paintings. I have found that Anatomy has provided the right tools for me to create true to life human forms.

You have developed a unique method of artistic expression dubbed ‘Grantique’, please tell us more about what it means and entails

When creating this original art, my intention is to involve the observer, as much as possible, in the story being portrayed by the art piece through flowing colors. I use 3D computer programs that employ forms created within the potential 3D space of the computer monitor. After arranging the structures within this space, I paint the contents digitally (called mapping), determine the lighting and atmospheric conditions, then direct the computer to render (to create from a 3D mathematical function to a 2D pictorial realization) the image. This rendered image is then taken to a photo manipulation program where lighting, shadows, and colors are modified to satisfy my creative needs. The image is then taken to a painting program that allows me to use a pen-like mouse (Stylus) to draw structures on the image; i.e., clothes, hair, water, sand, leaves, and skin textures. I then use PhotoShop to create flowing layers of color and to intensify the 3D depth. Often I use Painter to create gentle brush strokes and soft colors. The final image is then printed on canvas or on paper with Chromium long-lived inks which are guaranteed to be 100% fade resistant up to 200 years. In the case of the canvas, further painting is done (after several coatings of polyurethane is applied) with either acrylics or oil to bring out the nuances (skin, hair, water foam, trees, waves) in the piece and to increase the interaction of the reflected light with the surface of the canvas. Skies are often difficult to recreate using the

computer so the skies have to be sometimes repainted to be completed. The brush strokes add the 3D texture to the canvas that interacts with light and produces wonderful visual illusions. This approach results in an art piece that feels similar to Renaissance artwork, yet also has a mixture of the Surrealist approach with a modern feel of highly reflective lights.

Your work is very digital in nature and you use a lot of computer programs such as photoshop and computer graphics which you then hand paint over using acrylic, what would you attribute as your main tool; your hands or your computer?

It is interesting that you say that my art is very digital in nature because I use a lot of computer programs. I wonder if one would say that older artwork is "Paintbrushlike" in nature. I see the computer as just a tool, similar to that of charcoal or paint and brushes without the mess and cleanup. When I use my stylus to draw something on the tablet that appears on the screen I see it as an extension of my hands and the mode of creation, to me, is the same as using a pencil or crayon. Unfortunately, many contemporary art critics have focused too much on the tools used to create the art and have not focused on the art itself. When I judge an art piece, I am imaging the artistic thought and creativity and how the piece makes me feel, instead of how it was created. The advantage I have found to using a computer is that I do not need a reference landscape or photograph to be inspired. The inspiration comes from my head and heart and then flows onto the computer; I can create anything using this method. So few of my art pieces are representational of a real place or person, everything flows from my imagination. As for how much is attributed to paint via computer, I would say about 60% computer and 40% acrylics or other media. It really depends on the results after printing on the canvas. Unfortunately the printing process has not kept up with computer technology therefore I have to assist the printer, however, if I do not like the results I will paint over the entire area. I do this often

with the sky in the art piece. And to finish off, my hands are always my “main tools”; would you ask a traditional artist if their hands or paintbrush is the main tool?

Describe your art in 3 words...

Dynamic, Vibrant, Color-intensive

Tell us about your current series of art work?

As mentioned above I love Renaissance art with its beautiful human forms and delicate depictions of human expression; and I have done this kind of painting over the years. The trend that is driving me right now is the amazing way that many artists are combining abstraction and realism into their artwork. I am currently engaging this art-form, in combination with my African-American, African-Caribbean roots and culture, and incorporating it into my art, and I have recently (in the past 3 years) focused on the concept of black lives and the link to their spiritual being (by rejecting the ego and focusing on the Atman), a subconscious force that connects all our lives. My inspirations come from dreams and cerebral visions that are present with me daily, and in this series I express it vibrantly in the colors and geometric shapes on the canvas. It is my goal to make an intense visual/emotional impact that affects the soul (ancestral spirit) of the viewer, so that the initial perceptual concept infects their consciousness and heart before it can be seen visually with their eyes. I truly believe that my art can touch everyone in this way and can exist as a messenger that probes through our skin and bones directly to the subconscious. Thus my recent project involves the exploration of self identity, and how the ego relates to our sense of reality. It discusses our questions of purpose and our own places within the greater fabric of society, all in an effort to heal our broken souls.

“I am excited and I can’t wait for the complete development AI technology. Can you imagine if they could look directly into my brain what kind of images they would see”

You create wearable art and combine the love of fashion and art into one, tell me us more about the technique and inspiration behind that

I have always thought about expropriating the art that we see on walls in the museum and galleries and having it personally with me everywhere I go. In the Digital Age, many people can now have art pieces appear on the screen of their phones as a way of keeping images they like with them. Influenced by the new developments in transferable art, in 2014, my son Julyan and I began placing my art on T-shirts and selling them to the public. This unique request went through a thorough process of finding the right way to reproduce my art onto clothing. We finally decided to accomplish this task through Dye Sublimation printing, since it is able to reproduce the colors of the art exactly and it is durable. Since I have always been interested in fashion design, I decided to begin creating high-end designed fashion garments using fabric printed with my artwork. This would personalize the fashion items and be uniquely created for clients. Personal identity has always played a major role in the discussion of fashion, especially as individuals make consistent fashion choices as to the way they want to display themselves to the public. By wearing certain clothes, adorning themselves with certain accessories, or by trying certain unorthodox hairstyles, they show off the perceived image they want to relay to their audience, as similarly seen in art. Fashion acts as the most explicit presentation of ego (conception of ourselves in our perceived reality) as our fashion choices play out our artistic expression. Over the past couple of years I formed the brand DKdesignfashion under the Next Level World LLC label to create artistic garments that express concepts of my art work and have combined music and videos with the fashion on the runway to immerse the audience into the theme of the collection.

What is the inspiration behind your current fashion collection

The current collection which will be presented on February 9th for New York Fashion Week is entitled "Colors in the Sand". The general concept involves the

observation of sand, and the comparison of a dune to the grains of sand that make it up. The dune itself appears in dull colors, ranging from beige to orange as a whole, yet each grain of sand bursts with the colors of the rainbow. Like the finding so many chromatic shades in the dunes of the desert, these sand-grains and their colors represent diversity, hidden behind the mask of quiet desolation. Each desert is unique in its own way, whether we lose ourselves in the sand storms of the Sahara, or dream of a desert night under the moon in Arizona. Inspired by the chromatography of the desert landscape, we've borrowed fashion styles from the people of the dunes of Morocco to the Gohbi Desert of China, and blended these ideas to produce this fashion collection that represents the individual colors of life coming together in chromatic harmony. So that even when one looks closely at the bland desert, they can still recognize the colors in the sand. Therefore, each garment in the collection is a sandy beige or yellow or orange with glimpses of bright color peeking out on the sleeves or pants.

You recently showed at Art Basel in Miami, tell us about that experience..

My experience at Basel is always intense and tiring. Most of our time was spent meeting other artists and gallery attendants in all the hubbub. We presented my work and fashion at show north of Miami in the town of Opa Locka, and it was great to interact with the young up and coming artists who attended. The best part of Art Basel in Miami was the more academic interactions and conversations that were discussed at Florida International University where I gave a lecture in 2017, and where my son Sebastian gave his own lecture last year. We formed as a part of an art panel and participated in very intense discussions about the role of Black Artist in the scene of Contemporary American Art, and the future of that art in the current gallery setting and in the current art market.

Your art has a futuristic & surrealistic feel to it, with the advancement of AI technology, and

developments like virtual reality, how do you think that will impact your work for the future?

I am excited and I can't wait for the complete development AI technology. Can you imagine if they could look directly into my brain what kind of images they would see, (just joking of course!)? Yes my work has always had elements of the future. Actually in Art Basel, my work was often referred to as pertaining to Afro-Futurism; to which I completely agree. I have explored the ancestral spirits of Afro-Americans in many of my paintings with an angle of their futuristic expectations, so I think my work will continue to fit into the futuristic development of the American artistic narrative. As for virtual reality, I have already explored the possibilities of turning some of my art pieces into virtual computer artwork, where the viewer can enter and interact with the 3d environment and can actually paint in the that world; changing the art-piece itself into the way they want to see it.

What are your 3 art trend predictions for 2019?

-Moving away from installations to more performance Art

-An increase in Afro-Futuristic Art

-The use of 3D printing in sculpting and other art forms

Do you have any advice for young budding artists looking to get into the art world?

I have given lectures to young and budding artists, and the main suggestion I have tried to promote and encourage is to look within your spirit, your Atman, and to try to separate what the ego is telling you versus your true self; this is where the real artist is sequestered. By reconnecting with our ancestral spirits and our Atman, the creativity will flow and the young will blossom like tulip fields in Amsterdam. In particular, we must inform the youth of minority and (especially) Afro-American communities that what you have been told about yourselves by TV and the media are lies meant to suppress your talents. I would like to incorporate the ideas of the true self that I have expressed in my artwork to help

reshape the black identity towards a more positive light. I would tell youths to create art communities that do not only limit availability to the typical art elite, but which are also available to the diverse surrounding neighborhood, especially in under-privileged environments.

Considering you have such futuristic elements mixed with surrealism in your art, if you could go back or forward in time where would you go?

I would return back to a time when art and the Renaissance coincided to produce glorious works such as **The Bacchus** by the Renaissance master Caravaggio. His 1597 oil painting of a youthful Bacchus is one of his most acclaimed works, and which hangs in Florence's Uffizi Gallery. It is to this time that I would go back.

What is next for you in 2019?

It seems the 2019 will be a busy year. I am currently designing the new fashion line and completing a few more art pieces. It seems that I will be involved in about 5 different events from now until Fashion Week in September. Besides the fashion show in New York Fashion Week Spring season (Feb. 9), I will also be taking part in an event at The Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC that I am looking forward to. I will be presenting new clothing that are Gender Neutral and Kind-wear (clothing made for compassionate purposes, that helps people understand that all clothing is for everyone), hosted by Catherine Schuller. I have been invited to some other events, but have not decided as yet.

To find out more please visit DKFineArtDesign [HERE](#) & for more on Derrick's fashion label please click [HERE](#)

More of Derrick's art & designs below:

