



Published in **Fine Living Lancaster**
Issue Number Twenty-Three • August, 2012

Reprinted with permission from
Fine Living Lancaster and Virtual Media Group.

All contents of this issue of *Fine Living Lancaster* are copyrighted by
Fine Living Lancaster and Virtual Media Group. All rights reserved.

The Business of Art

By Nicole Patterson

It isn't very often you find an artist who is able to successfully market his artwork and his ideas. In a world where originality of craft needs to be constantly combined with marketing and advertising for us to even notice or care, Sean Martorana is at the top of his game. I don't readily associate graphic designers, painters, artists as being entrepreneurs or businessmen, but perhaps I should reconsider the new wave of go-getters—the collaborators who turn reciprocity into profits, and the promoters who use self-awareness as branding and identity.

I visited Sean at his home in Philadelphia one early Saturday afternoon. He has wide eyes and dark hair, and wears a stainless steel four-pyramid double knuckle ring he designed. After walking up three flights of steps and entering his front door, I walked down his hallway filled with thirty or so paintings, piled and stacked like records and hung high on the wall. The first thing that strikes me about seeing his art in person is its primitive nature. It's a mixture of tribal and graffiti with a little kick of rock n'roll.

I'm standing in his living room and can't help but notice a pair of black wings hanging on the wall above his computers. They're not sexy, runway wings, but more angel of death wings, as I'd describe it. He notices my fixation and he tells me they're from an old photo shoot. There's some blues music playing; someone sings, "You don't love me, you don't love me no more." He's sitting on the couch, opposite a nine-foot tall cardboard mural that has black spray paint and Sharpie marker tagged on it. Over top, pinned on the board hangs my favorite piece of his

collection—a red colored pencil sketch of Socrates, who has a handsome beard. Often the heart of an artist sits like the purloined letter, out in the open and disguised as ordinary, public, common. There are plants on the windowsills and a candle burning on the stove. *GD magazine* sits on his coffee table.

After a few short niceties and introductions we leave and head out for something to eat. We walk a short distance from his apartment to Johnny Brenda's and have a drink and a burger. The city is teeming with people as we pass by "city sidewalks" that are littered with the most fascinating combinations of trash and stories we couldn't possibly begin to connect or explain. Along the way we stop on Frankford Street. Sean's been given a proposition to paint a mural on the side of a building—something that will capture the spirit of the city dwellers, and grab their attention. I'm learning that he's a savvy businessman when it comes to doing his art in a big way.

Part of that instinctive know-how comes from the education he's had inside and outside the classroom. "I was always a self-taught artist. I went to school to learn the programs," he says. After graduating from The Art Institute of Philadelphia he worked at his best friend's parent's printing business. "I was a designer there for two years and then I moved on. They supported me throughout. Tom Bellia, my best friend's dad, took me under his wing and taught me how to run a business, how to sell," Sean says. But with that business knowledge then flowed marketing.

As we walk to Frankford Hall, a bar across the street, he tells me about the use of colors, specifically red and yellow, and how people don't have to think





"You need to educate yourself on business and marketing. You can be the greatest painter in the world but if you don't know how to show people and put it out there, nobody will ever see it. It's not a bad thing to promote yourself. People in the world need to see art. You have art. Promote it."



Continued from previous page

of advertising as some evil thing. "It's about education. Education is the key. I had a more real-world education. I was lucky because I knew people who helped me through it. Not everyone has that. I try to teach artists that you can do marketing. You can do business."

We sit in the sun and watch other people come and go. Frankford Hall has some pretty cool marketing ideas themselves. It's a beautiful beer garden with picnic tables and games, and lots and lots of people on the weekend. Later, after dark, they turn on fire pits and allow patrons to purchase marshmallows and roast smores. The more comfortable you make people, the longer they will want to stay and enjoy their friends, food, and beer. He continues telling me about his schooling: "A lot of art schools don't teach the business of art. They teach you how to do the art and how to structure your art, but when you go out into the real world you have to sell your art." He tells me what I already know, being a contracted freelancer myself. "You have to be a salesperson and you have to market your stuff. Then, when you start making sales, you have to be the bookkeeping person. You wear so many hats. It's entrepreneurship," he says with passion in his voice. He wants to show me one of his biggest inspirations, so we say goodbye to the beer garden and take the \$2 train down to a place called Indy Hall.

Short for Independents Hall, this co-working space is similar, in theory, to The Candy Factory in Lancaster. The idea is to give freelancers, artists, writers, small business owners, a place to work and share ideas with other like-minded and hardworking people. "It's like a clubhouse. There are coders, illustrators, game designers, scientists, writers, foodies, and even a successful clothing designer," he tells me. The day before my visit, Sean participated in an art show on their newly renovated and now open first floor, which they plan to use as an art studio or gallery. The coolest idea behind Indy Hall is that you're surrounded by the best coworkers imaginable. Everyone is trying to be productive and the synergy is palpable. I wandered around, looking at people's desks and at the whiteboards and offices. Even the kitchen was fully functional. What a place to be! The best part, of course, is that there are no cubicles, membership is totally reasonable, and there is art everywhere...thanks to Sean.

Introduced to the idea of co-working by his brother, Sean started going there and working, painting, talking to other

members, gathering inspiration and focus. At first it was just bare walls until one of the co-founders asked him if he wanted to do some work. Sean told him, "Don't give me the green light or I'm going to go crazy." Not only did he paint his artwork on the walls, but he hung artwork, decorated chairs, and did a very, very cool mural on the windows to the meeting and conference rooms. He says to me, "It's about making the space a better place to work. You should go to an office space and be excited. If you create a beautiful space, it's no longer a negative context. You shouldn't have to live your life in a cubicle. If you allow people to be creative they'll get more done."

As I collect business cards in the corner, I finally start to understand the process of what Sean's been saying. You get the education you need to do what you love. You learn about the business and the market. You surround yourself with people who encourage you to express your art, and then you just go crazy. I wave goodbye to the pet turtle, swimming in its tank near the window, and we move to his favorite hotspot, where he indeed knows everyone and everybody knows his name.

About a block south of Indy Hall, across Market Street, on South 3rd Street, is one of the coolest bars I've ever visited. The mechanics of every electrical do-hickey and whirligig on the wall are beyond fascinating. National Mechanics was originally built in 1837 and has survived fires between the walls. It has been a church, a bank, a club, and now a restaurant...filled with a bridal party. The décor is overflowing with homemade lighting fixtures that you seriously must see to appreciate. They also put famous Philadelphians on some of their pub glasses. After a very long discussion on how cool this is and why our mugs aren't on their mugs, we sit together and think. National Mechanics, according to their website, encourages curiosity and appreciation for the design and work that has been molded by those who came before us. That's pretty deep stuff.

Now back to that red colored pencil sketch of Socrates I told you about at the beginning of this article. Remember it? Well since we're in so deep now, I thought I would learn more. The colored pencils actually came from Sean's grandfather who was an engineer. And I noted that a lot of his work uses red. "Red is the color I use most often. I think it's the most powerful color. It attracts people. The psychology of it gets you moving. It raises your heartbeat. It's the color of blood."



Photo by Skout Media



*Original Photo by Will Concepcion
Design by Sean Martorana*

Sean Martorana
sean@seanmartorana.com
www.seanmartorana.com



It's the color of love. It has a lot of very powerful meanings on both sides of the realm," he says. Although he swears clear is his favorite color.

We talk about the process of his art and how he is expanding it to reach all other areas—literally. His apartment looks a bit like someone trying very desperately to communicate a message through symbolic brushstrokes. It's on his chairs, his walls, his shower curtain, his phone. "It's like graffiti because it's tagged all over everything, all the surfaces available. It's on my iPhone case. I'm bringing my art and style to every aspect: fashion, jewelry, painting, t-shirts, murals, office spaces, furniture, architecture. People like it. They can use it. They can interact with it."

And interact they do. Sean maintains clients from his previously owned business as a graphic designer. He still enjoys helping rebrand and reposition companies and believes art is in marketing and in graphic design. By this point we've gone to Morgan's Pier and watched the sun set and nightlife begin. The city is beautiful at night. We've ended up at The Abbaye. We're talking about dreams and goals in our professional lives. "Don't ever do anything for anyone else. Always do it for you. If you don't do it for you, it's not going to be real. It's not going to be powerful." He tells me, as he sketches in my notebook that, like most artistic people, art can be therapeutic. But he does like to be spontaneous, hence painting on the walls or on cardboard or windows. "I know my own feelings when I go into a piece. I want to know what they feel," he says. And he always enjoys when someone else gets stuff out of his art (meanings, symbols) that he's never seen. "It actually creates a new painting for me." And in that way the collaboration begins. The artist and the audience connect and a brand new idea arises.

Socrates is in the living room. Plato is in his room. "I thought it would be an interesting subject to design the busts of philosophers, designed in a way that reflected their actual philosophy," he says—tired, as it's after 3 AM. Most of what we know about Socrates we learned from his students, like Plato. But, of course we know that incorporating education into art truly makes it relevant, worthwhile, and worthy of our attention. "There's a story behind the art," he says, much like his other influences, Picasso, Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Bill Watterson (his earliest influence was the mastermind behind "Calvin & Hobbes").

At 4 AM we wrap up the day and our interview with his thoughts on where we are in history. "Our generation is witnessing all this change. It's a time of transition. We're morphing into a new way of doing things. From financial institutions to fine art. People need to learn new ways of doing things," he says.

It's not often you meet an artist who is so self-aware, and willing to be forging the path of a new generation of designers and creators. I can't help but laugh to myself about the primitive style of his materials and paintings. The symbolism goes beyond the art. In fact, his style is indeed an evolutionary and historical development. I look forward to the future, outside the cave, closer to the sun. 🌻

Describe what you want your life to mean in two words.

Creative freedom

What words or statement would you want on your headstone?

Live to create. Created to inspire.

What's your favorite breakfast?

French toast and sausage.

What's your favorite place in Lancaster?

I like Revival skate shop.

What's your favorite place in Philly?

Indy Hall

Name a new medium you're learning.

Stained glass. It's a lost art that's coming back.

What's your favorite movie?

"Requiem for a Dream" or "Fight Club"

Tell me your favorite comic book character.

The Maxx

Name two pet peeves.

Random water drops falling on you when you're walking through the city. You don't know where they're coming from. Is an air conditioner? Did someone spit on you? And negative people.