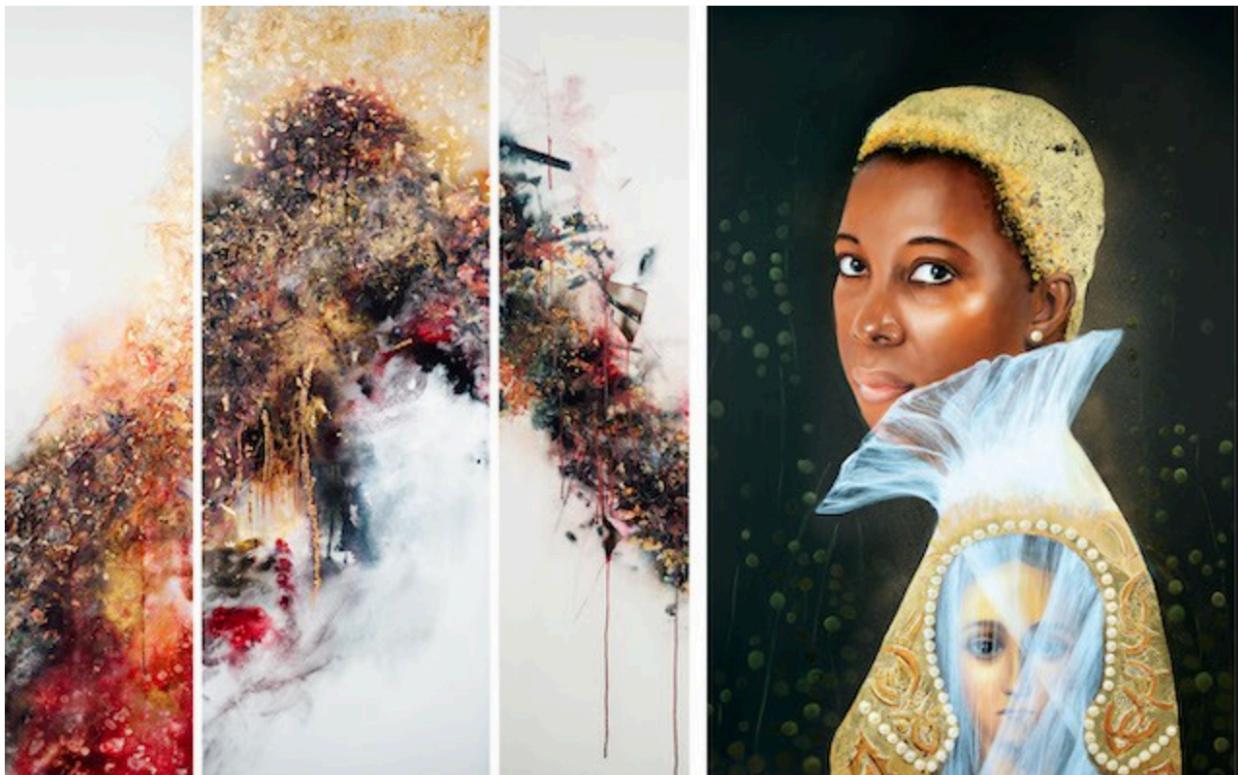


INDIVIDUALISM AND *Community*

by Dan Volenec

© 2020

The copyright holder allows anyone use of this article for any purpose, provided that the copyright holder is properly attributed.



Kelly Kruse

www.kellykrusecreative.com

Natalia Berglund

<https://nataliaberglund.com>

I recently attended the *Idealized Imperfection* artist talk and exhibition at the University of St. Thomas. Artists Kelly Kruse and Natalia Berglund were so perfectly matched I paused to wonder if they had been separated at birth. Each expressed their confidence as individuals. And each offered the community encouragement, enlightenment and strength. This intimate exhibition is open through May 22nd. I strongly urge you to set aside time to view these glorious images and contemplate their rich subject matter.

Kelly Kruse opened her talk at St. Thomas stating her work is informed by theology, scripture, music and poetry. She has clearly defined what propels her and thus her imagery reflects her day to day contemplations. Similar to Kelly, my work is also defined by theology and scripture. I have been a follower of Jesus Christ for almost forty years. My love of art allows me to partner with beauty and glorify my maker. That which I create links to my struggles, enlightenment and faith (or lack thereof). The point I'm attempting to make is that as artists we need to know ourselves as individuals if we are to begin sharing ourselves. Of what value are any of us if we merely try to copy the path of someone else. Remember, each of us is unique. The broader community vitally needs the voice of each of us.



Natalia Berglund's paintings are exceedingly brave, filled with dramatic, challenging figures and rich Orthodox iconography. Much of what she creates is carefully studied and defined, though some areas of her work appear as haphazard, energetic, explosions. Among other things, her work encourages me to not neglect the spontaneous.



When Suzann Beck approached me to write a short essay for the Minnesota Portrait Network I soon realized I wanted to address the subject of individualism and community. My art training dates back to the 1970's when I attended two different colleges and then completed a two year commercial art certificate. I continued to pursue fine art, becoming a part time student for four years at the now famous Atelier Lack under the tutelage of Stephen Gjertson. Unlike today, Atelier training was almost nonexistent in the 70's. Because of the limited training offered at that time, there was a tendency for all of us at Atelier Lack to paint and think alike. We were 'rare birds' in an almost exclusively contemporary art world. We stuck together and needed each other's support.

Fifty years has produced a radical change. Sound art training can be found world wide. The internet offers virtual classes for every style and subject matter imaginable. Workshops abound, taught by the art world's brightest and best. Yet with this plethora of instruction, I believe there still abides a tendency for us to paint and think alike.

So let us step back for a minute. We are all created as unique individuals. Add to our creation the vast circumstances that continue to shape us each day, further heightening our individualism. Very quickly it is easy to see there has never been, nor will there ever be again, anyone remotely like each of us.

With regards to individualism, where do you stand? Are you comfortable with your artistic direction? Or do you have trouble defining who you are? If that is the case, where should you start? I suggest simply going back to the beginning. What excites you as an artist? Is there a pattern to the works you continually review? When you open an art magazine, on which images do you linger? Do the same museum pieces hold your attention time after time? Answers to these questions give you a starting point as you hone in on who you are artistically. And of course over the years your art will change as you grow and change. That is one of the elements of the art world that is a pleasurable constant.

I have a strong abstract artistic background and to this day I love contemporary art. At age 16 the world of sculptor Henry Moore opened up to me as if I knew exactly what it was Moore was attempting to convey. So of course when I went off to college my goal was to become the next Henry Moore. I eventually left Henry behind, and during the next three decades my abstract art explored rhythms and repetition. At age 50 I realized I wanted to reach a much broader audience with my imagery. I had always been interested in figurative work and I quickly gravitated to drawing and painting large portraits hoping my work would connect with as many people as possible. I love the challenge of creating subtle expression and examining that 'drive-me-crazy' world of portrait half tones. I also love adding many layers of subtle color shifts and am constantly playing with and thinking about edge definition. The elements of portrait drawing and painting have held me captive for 14 years and I don't see a release anywhere in the near future.

As I've progressed in the portrait world I've also come to believe that it is vitally important for me to just be me, to be as honest with my approach to creating as I can. I liken this approach to becoming one thread in a large tapestry. I am not supposed to be any other thread simply because those threads already exist. If I am to be of any significance, then I have to be brave and work hard to be the unique thread I was initially created to be. You already see where I'm going with this. If collectively we don't become those unique threads, we have no tapestry. Or at least we don't have the beautiful tapestry that was intended.

A healthy artistic community, a vital artistic community is one where each artist contributes to their fullest as an individual. The Portrait Society of America has many outstanding examples. Rose Frantzen, Mary Whyte, Mario Robinson, David Kassan, Quang Ho, the list goes on and on. All have sound fundamentals and all are easily recognizable from a distance because they have taken their craft to a uniquely personal level.

I'll close by encouraging all of you to be brave, be strong, and rejoice in the enjoyment of exploring your individual creative path. Remember we need the uniqueness of each other. Strive to be that unique vessel, carrying that unique message. All of the rest of us need exactly who you are and who you will become. You are vitally important to this big, living picture that is created day by day. Additionally let's be here for one another. We all know that seriously contending in the art world is not for the faint of heart. There will be many more crushing blows than there will ever be ecstatic exaltations. Therefore, when opportunities present themselves to encourage and uplift, let us commit to upholding one another.

God bless and keep you all. Through your friendships and your work I thank you for all you continue to give to me.

Dan

www.danvolenec.com

Instagram @danvolenec