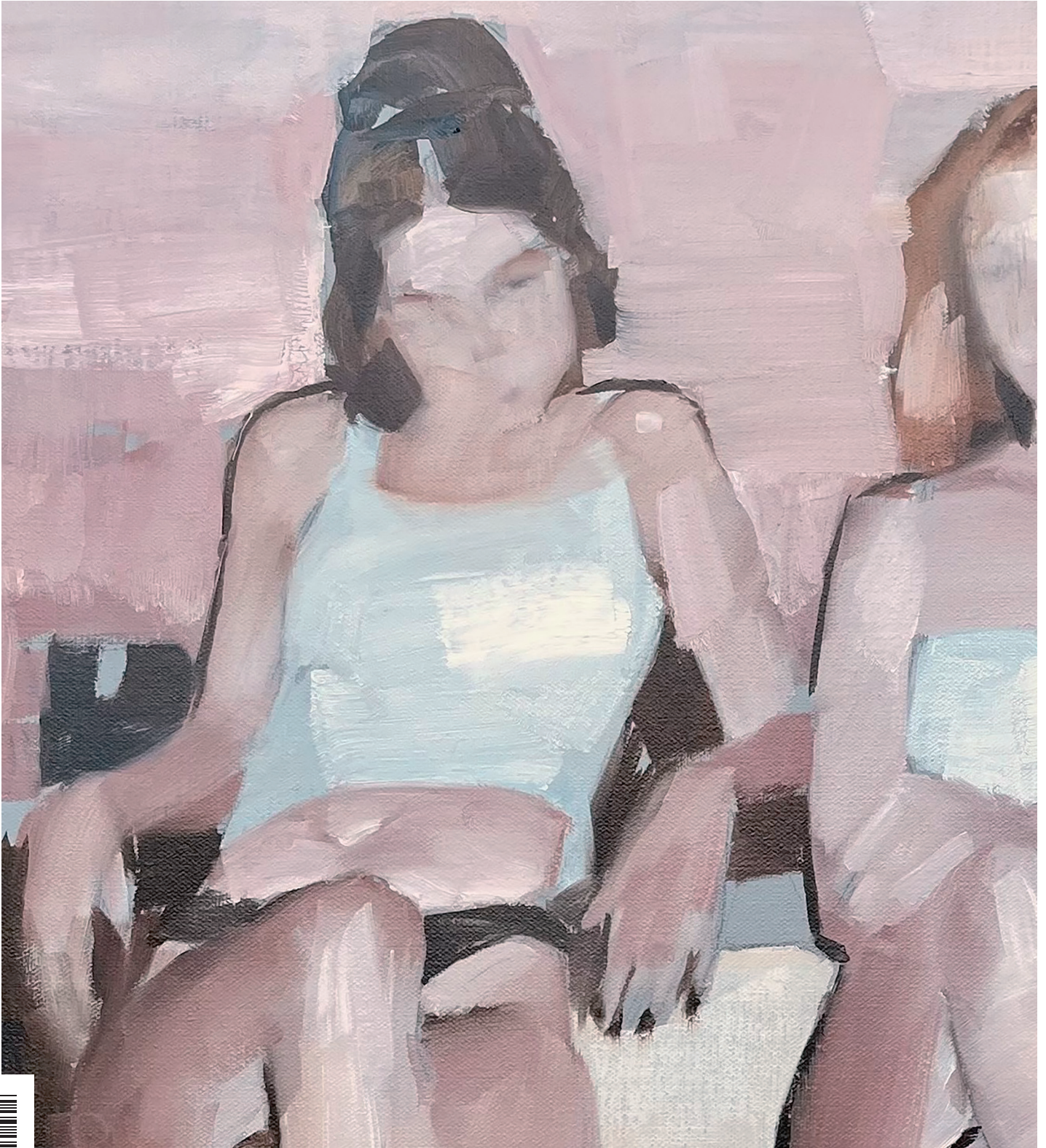


french fries

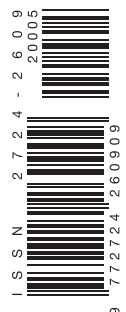
€15 | £13 | US\$19.95

Spring/Summer 2022
Issue 05



MARK TENNANT

THE WILD AT HEART ISSUE





FRENCH FRIES

MARK TENNANT

Your life is work, is that right?

Yes. And, you know, I hear about people that have their studio in a different location, and then they go back home. And I mean, because when I think about it, and I want to go in and check what I'm currently working on before I go to sleep and see what I have, you know, because after you look at it all day, you can't see clearly anymore, sometimes you need to get away. So I go to another room, ride the bike, watch some television or whatever, and then come back in later in the evening, and then I have a fresh eye, a fresh approach, a fresh way of looking at it.

Is anybody looking at your works and giving their advice, like you could be doing this or could be doing that, or you just show them at the end?

Well, my wife, but then everything is good, you know, she could be biased. Maybe she is just being nice to me. So, you have to go by your own instincts, I think. Is it right? Is it not? I like to hear things from people, but it's hard to take it really seriously, especially if it's your wife, I mean, she's going to say something nice.

So when you find out you have an exhibition that's when you show them to people, do you get nervous?

I guess I get a little bit nervous, but less so lately... So I guess I'm nervous to some extent. But I'm not so attached to these paintings that it's life and death, because then I'm just going to the next one. So yes, I hope people like them. And if they buy them, I think that's the ultimate expression.

Your paintings look like photographs, how do you start them and who are your subjects?

I use found photographs. I take photographs myself. To start the painting it's very important that I have the right image because I don't know until I get into it. But I spend a great deal of time laying it out and planning about how it's going to be placed on the canvas and measuring proportion and so forth. It's very important that you spend that initial time on your plan. Now once you've developed a plan it's just like war. You know, you can make the best plans in the world but once the action starts, be prepared and be flexible, because you can go anywhere at that point. But I need some sort of a plan to get me started. I can't just start without an accurate underdrawing, and so forth. But that only enables me to have something to hang the expressiveness or artistry, whatever on, I need that first. I need something to get me started. I can feel that I have some sort of harness. I'm harnessing the expressiveness. But I'm also not afraid to make a change if I have to. A lot of people say they would like to see a demonstration, I do demos when I teach, but most of the demonstration is very boring, because I'm measuring it, and I'm laying it out. And to get to the fun part, you can't do that until you get that initial layout down. We were talking last night about people that write novels, and particularly people that write detective stories or to write mystery novels. I imagine they must put together a big chart first on the plot, they plot it out literally on a chart, once they have their plot figured out the prose begins.

Photography:
Milton Arellano



How do you plan your stories?

It's hard to say, because the thing with painting is, and this is what I talk about a lot, is that the first thing that you want someone to do is to stop in front of your work. Whether it's if they're walking down the street, it's in a gallery window, whether they're scrolling on their phone, the first thing I want to do is to make them stop. So how do you make them stop? I mean, there are a lot of other things to look at. There's a lot of great art, there's advertising, there's fashion, there's so many things that are happening to look at, so how am I going to get them to stop in front of my work, and it should be a sort of a provocative subject, it has to be a subject that's going to make them stand back a minute and say, "Well, what is it? I'm not sure exactly what's going on there." Once they start to get into that, then they're not moving anymore, they're not scrolling anymore, I've got them there. Now I'm going to start to pull them into it with brushwork and color and shape and design. I want to do is get their attention and make them stop what they're doing and look at it. So I need an image that's going to have that sort of power... but then that's not my main thing. My main thing is to get them to look at it, make them stop and then make them come closer and then participate in the work and the broken brushwork and get involved in with a piece themselves.

And there's mystery, because all your paintings are very modern, but then when you look it could be in the 40s or in the 50s, so there's always something new to discover.

That's sort of what I think about it, we have to paint the era, the time in which we live now, but you also have to do it not just with the particular styles of the day or whatever, you have to do it with the way people see the world around them. And in the past 50 years, people have been looking at the world through a lens, whether it's a television, a movie lens, or an iPhone, they're looking at the world now through a lens to such an extent that now they begin to see it themselves like a lens. And there's a lot of distortion in the lens. But without that distortion, I find that people are not as attracted to it, they're more attracted to things that they can relate to. And we have been conditioned to see like a camera lens. So I think the fact that you can take 1000 photos, so you can stop action all over the place and that's a contemporary feeling and that needs to be conveyed. I think through the brushwork and the color and so forth.

What are the artists that you're most inspired by?

I love Manet but I'd say in a very modern way. If we think of him now, I mean he's mid 19th century, but you know, when he painted those paintings they were very modern. I like to think of him as if he were my conscience. I think of him like, I mean, they're all my conscience, I guess from Manet, Degas, and Velázquez. I love the 17th century, and I understand Manet much better through the 17th century. Through Rembrandt I see Manet, through Ribera the Spanish painter I see Manet, I see the Clubfoot Boy, I see the Fifer. I see these paintings that are very difficult to comprehend. For many years, I've been looking at them and they're so unusual. And it's just an ongoing experience. But I love Manet, and I love the Spanish painting of the 17th century and I love French Rococo, 18th century painting.

You have exhibited twice at Salon d'Automne in Paris, could you tell us more about that?

Well, what happened with Salon d'Automne is I got involved in it strictly through history because the famous 1904 exhibit of the Fauves, of Matisse came out of that. So I sort of knew the significance of it in that sense. I mean, there's quite a list of artists who have exhibited, it's a different situation now, but it was a breakthrough for 20th century painting. So I was in Paris, and I knew a French girl. And she was the one that said you've got to enter Salon d'Automne. And that's how it started. I found out how important it is today. I thought more of history. But I've never actually been there when they had the show. Because it's either one thing or another. I have never been there. But I have a stepdaughter in Paris where the last painting I had there was a portrait of her and myself like a self portrait with her. And she was staying with the painting much of the time, so she talked to a lot of people there.



It's like you go to Paris to be a painter like you go to LA to become an actor.

When I first started to go to Paris. And then I lived there and I even went so far as to live at addresses. I lived on the Ile Saint-Louis, I actually stayed in Daumier's house a couple times. And so I immersed myself in some of the history of Paris and where these artists lived.. So I tried to follow these artists even to be at and paint locations, similar to where they were. I copied the same paintings in the Louvre that Delacroix copied and visited Manet's grave, etc. I taught in Paris, and I was surprised that the students were not aware of many of these historical aspects.

All these artists touched your heart, because you paint with your heart.

Well, I think you know, I think that not only are they the artists that came before us, but I truly feel that we are in a chain. And now there is going to be a link after me. And I want to find out about the future. And these people that are coming in the next group. And really, I want us all to realize that we're in this chain that's going to go on forever. I mean, we need to know every one, every link, we need to understand who came before and what's going to come after. but we are a link.

What's your vision for the future of art?

From the beginning I heard in my undergraduate days in school that painting is dead, but it's not dead. people are reviving it, it refuses to die. There are limitless ideas that can be expressed through painting. Things come and go, and music, and film, but painting is always there. I tell this story a lot and



I'll tell it again, so many things in the course of my life I thought were great, and I started going to museums like it was a church when I was 18 years old. I started to understand the history of the copies over the years, because they've been copying for centuries, and it's interesting that you can conduct a dialogue with these old masters, and they have so much to give you. And life goes on, I go back to something I really liked years ago, and I'm disappointed. I go back to a piece of music that I liked, and I play it again, and it's not as good. With painting it's the opposite, it keeps getting better. Rembrandt is greater, it continues to be greater in my mind. Painting cannot die, because it has this very unique place in our culture, these pieces of canvas that are protected by uniformed guards, and put in gold frames... There's a reason they have that value and they go through centuries and they continue to make people think about who they are and why they're doing what they're doing. I heard a great quote that fashion is something that looks beautiful at first, but then becomes ugly. Art is ugly at first and then becomes beautiful... so I'm not downplaying fashion because fashion is also where I get so many ideas and inspiration from, and the streets from looking at people.

What do you think success is in the life of an artist?

When something goes right with your work, that's a legitimate thrill. It doesn't happen often, but when it happens, there's nothing better. I'm constantly chasing that, because I know it's there. That's when you know it. When you nail it, you know it. The more you work, the more it's going to occur, it happens when you least expect it, I think. When you're in the middle of it, all of a sudden in the middle of chaos, you feel something happening, and I think it only happened because you stood up to it in the most difficult circumstances right there, and something really surprising happens out of that.

Is there any of your work that you feel is so personal that you wouldn't sell it?

No, I want to sell it. I just sold a portrait of my wife. I want somebody else to look at them, I want to be in their homes, I want to clear out and start painting new ones. Every time that I paint a picture, that image, it's permanently there in my head.

How long does it take?

It depends, some of them just jump off the pallet. It's trial and error, and concentration. you need to be aware and prepared for whatever it takes.

For how long have you been locked in your studio for the longest?

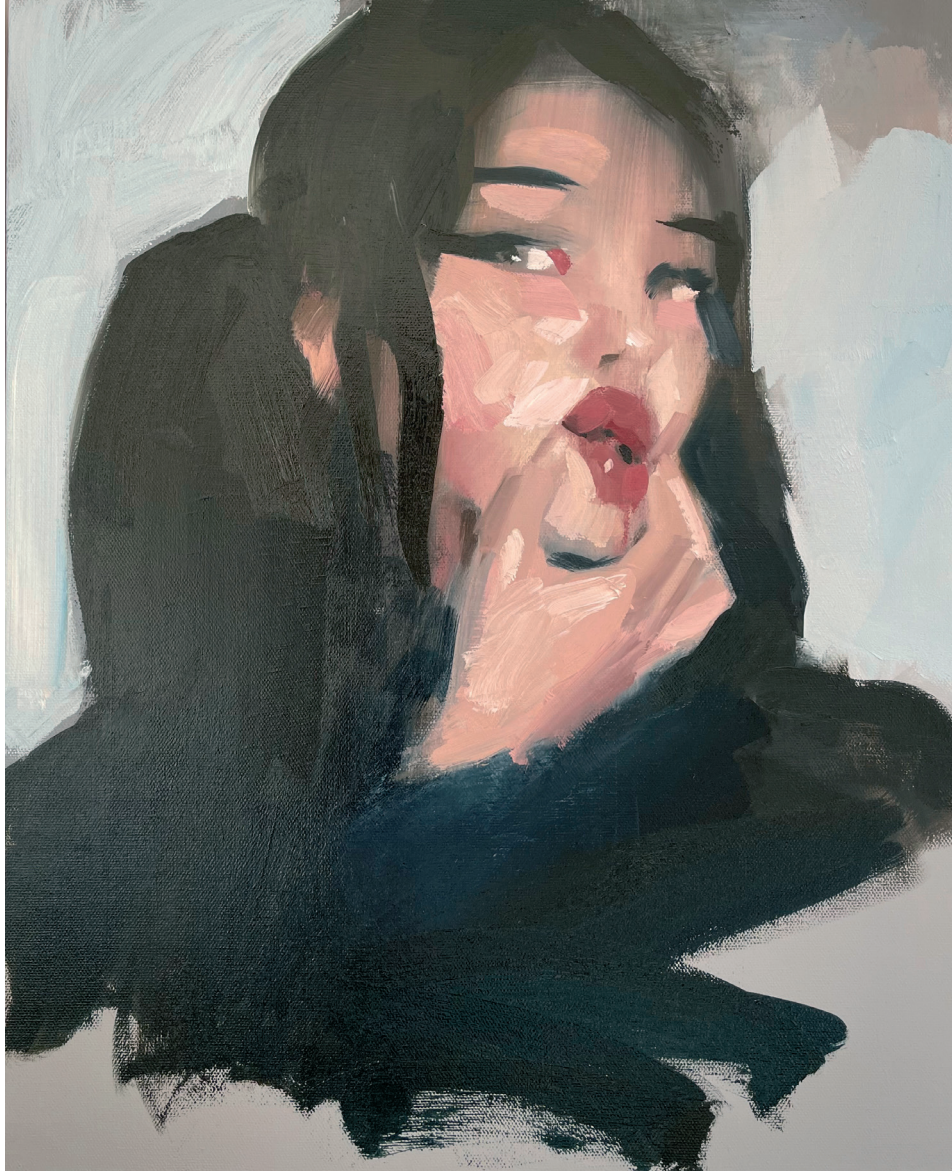
Well, I paint everyday, 7 days a week, it's an obsession, a healthy one. If I'm any good at it, its because I'm old and I've been doing this for a long time, you have to do this every day. I say to my students, if you throw darts... if you start on Monday morning and you throw darts all day long, then by Friday and week after week, you will be hitting bullseye more often and you'll get better and better.

Do you work with a gallery? Or do you work as an independent artist? How does that work?

I have galleries all over the world. In Tel Aviv, and in Paris, and Oslo, Madrid, Montreal, I keep them updated on my recent available paintings, and we keep putting them out there. And then they select what they want. And then I ship them to the galleries.

We love the faces with no faces.

Well, you know, a lot of people bring that up. It's like, a lot of times I'll paint the face, I'll paint the head. And then what happens is I want them to get in there. If I give them too much information, then they're going to become bored with it or it'll become monotonous. I like to keep it. If it's a portrait, yeah, if it's a formal portrait, but so many of these are not portraits. And if you get into the



portrait, it's hard to restrain yourself because you want to do it. I mean, I catch myself all the time. And then I just scrape and I say, "No, you can't." Because the next thing you know, you're going to be looking into their eyes." I don't want that, I want these people to exist as figures in a composition more than portraits.

Yes, it's storytelling. Like Nick Knight said that good artists intrigue, but then to have mystery, like not say at all, because then a lot of people can tell their own stories, you know, they can identify with it.

I completely agree because art in itself is a mystery. I mean, people, that's sort of why they're drawn to it because it has this quality, like, are we really sure what we're looking at? I mean, these are figures but am I looking at figures or am I looking at paint? I'm looking at paint, you know, and I'm looking at shape. And I'm looking at color and design. They're figures, but the figures are almost an excuse to make designs. It's almost like, well, we are human beings, we are made to look at one another. So that's what I paint. But it's only because I need an excuse to start moving that paint around, you know, so I like humans the best. They have infinite possibilities of what can be done. So I use them, but I'm definitely not always interested in painting them as a portrait. So some of the faces are more generalized.

You say that we're looking at the world through a lens. Are you getting inspiration from movies and photographers?

Well, I think the interest right now it's coming from the fact that everybody is a photographer now. Everybody in their pocket has a fantastic camera. So everybody's taking beautiful pictures, where it used to be a production with all equipment and lighting. And you would go and you would purchase film, and you would have a roll with only 36 exposures. Everyone of them would be rationed out. And you thought about that, as you were shooting. Now you have this fantastic camera with all these great lenses. And you just click, click, click, click, it's like everybody is recording everything around them, and then posting it. We have been conditioned to see it like that lens, a convex shape. Our eye has a convex lens, that we



„The great thing about art is that it's complete freedom. We have freedom to do this and do it our whole life. Until the day we die. Nobody's going to tell us we can't do it. ”

have a brain that corrects the distortion, and I don't want to lose that distortion in my paintings. I used to go and get rid of all the distortion. And if I use that photo, but now I want to I want to explore that. I mean, I want to get the new iPhone, I just want the better lens. I want to keep getting the better camera and carry it at all times.

I love that you love the past and you love the future, and that is what makes you unique. You know, some people can go against technology, some people that like so much the value of the painting, but you actually love it, and it's clear that's in your work.

I'm trained in tradition, I taught a somewhat traditional system. I haven't been teaching for a few years now. But I mean, the whole idea was using the plumb line with the academic proportions sight measuring and memorizing the proportion charts. So drawing from life was my main thing, and the camera I thought of as almost the enemy of that until I realized that the work that I like the best right now is photo derived. And at an advanced age. I said no, this is, this is great. Manet could paint modern life because modern life was more beautiful then. Modern life had more beautiful fashion, more beautiful clothing. That was an excuse. Because I'm not there. I'm not in the 19th century So let's exploit this great gift of the Internet and these cameras that we all carry around. And I want to do camera functioning with paint.

Do you like to study your painting by looking at pictures?

Yes, it's very helpful. It's just another tool. It's like a brush, that palette knife, there are no rules. I mean, you can do whatever you want. The great thing about art is that it's complete freedom. We have freedom to do this and do it our whole life. Until the day we die. Nobody's going to tell us we can't do it. I mean, we have this, we can do it forever. And this freedom, let's take advantage of everything we have.

Nobody would tell you that you should do it like this. You discovered something new and this is definitely something that is revolutionary right now. What is the advice you would have for the artists that are starting now? What is your message?

My main advice for beginning artists is to copy the old masters. At first they may think, it's so old and they're dark. And there are these figures in these strange costumes. You have just to open your mind and look at them and imagine the paint is still wet on these paintings. They are freshly painted, they're not old, they're not cracked or not a guard standing there. Let's try to imagine these paintings as if we knew that Rembrandt was just taking a break. He was just around the corner or something. Let's look at it like, why is that Done that way? Could I possibly do that? Make that edge transition from an opaque color into a transparent color. Could I? Yeah, I can do it. I can try to do it like that, and not even think anymore that it's cracked and it's old and it's valuable and all that but he was there to teach us and he is there to teach us now. So my advice is, you still need to draw from life. You still need to practice your drawing. But the Old Masters are a rapid way to make initial progress. It's rapid, when I first saw it, I was a student, and I copied some Rubens heads, not in a museum, I was so young, and I copied him from books. And I saw immediately they didn't look too bad. Not too bad for an 18 year old kid. So then I was in Philadelphia Museum copying a Van Dyck Crucifixion and I went to the Rodin museum and I noticed that it was the 19th century, right, but I started to draw these Rodin sculptures. They have a whole Rodin Museum in Philadelphia. And I could not believe how quickly my work improved from copying Van Dyke 17th century, and then going into the Rodin Museum, and then at night copying photographs of these Rodin sculptures in the evening while I was in Philadelphia. And within a week my work had gotten so much better. So my whole thing is, if you want to get better, the fastest way to get better, and time is moving, you know, we don't have much time here. The fast way to get better is to copy the masters. You need to control your life, you need to look at contemporary work but the discipline just like on the piano, you learn to play Bach, you learn to study the masters and get that keyboard down and figure that keyboard out. So that would be my advice. Read a lot and go to the museum a lot.