

BRANDON DALMER

Interviewed by Rebecca Ramsey

What's your background?

I'm originally from Edmonton and moved to Calgary to attend AUArts in 2003. After graduating, my cohort and I started a small independent gallery space called 809 Gallery in a house in Calgary. In 2009 I moved to Toronto and then in 2013 I heard that the Calgary house was going to be torn down. When I got in touch with the condo developers they actually gave me permission to use the whole block which was slated for demolition. So we were able to modify the houses and set up installations and work. The project is called [Wreck City](#). Aside from my own practice, I am interested in being involved in these types of curatorial projects which give opportunities for emerging artists.

What are you curious about?

Generally I'm really interested in outer space. I research it a lot, it's not necessarily related to art but it's exciting when I find things that connect. There's an image I found that was taken by a space probe in the sixties - it was one of the very first image translation machines. It was pretty much the first time images were converted into a digital signal. I found that very fascinating and have been researching that a lot. It's a good jumping off point. Other than that I love making machines, exploring new mediums, and trying to push the boundaries of what I know. I enjoy the process of making and I am constantly looking at how to make things online. For example, I often visit the site Instructables which is where I learned how to use Arduino.



Which Artists have been influential?

David Hockney, Gerhard Richter, Tom Sachs, Sol Lewitt, Cory Archangel, Casey Reas, as well as Kim Dorland (he's an interesting painter for painters), Chris Cran, among others. I have a big collection of artist monographs. During my BFA, I watched David Hockney's film *Secret Knowledge*, which documents how Renaissance masters were using lenses and other techniques in order to render these really intricate paintings. When I saw this, I realized that we've been using technology alongside art for a long time. After that, I started focusing more on trying to render an image rather than objects.

What do you do all day?

When the lockdown first happened I did some research on how to stay productive. One of the things that really productive people do is write down a schedule of what they'll be doing with their day down to the hour. I tried to do that for a few weeks and felt pretty productive, but now that I have a studio I have blocks of time that just say 'studio'. I'm mostly there from late morning or noon until 9:00 or 10:00pm and I try to go every day.

What's your favorite part of your process?

I love the process of making, there are a lot of satisfying moments. I'll often listen to things while I'm applying vinyl or working with the machines. I'd say the most satisfying thing is

taking the tape off the edges of the painting right after it's varnished.

Which books/documentaries/fields of knowledge do you feel guided or inspired by?

I read a lot of postulative science fiction, cyberpunk novels from the 80's, new media theory or theory regarding AI. I collect a lot of documentaries and movies, I've recently been watching Adam Curtis' documentary series *All watched over by Machines of Love and Grace*. Also, I'm just finishing the *New Dark Age* by James Bridle which explores how reliant we've become on automation, and the societal consequences that it might have if the internet or our technology is compromised. I also listen to a lot of podcasts such as *Bad at Sports* or *Good Point Podcast*.

How has your practice changed or evolved over time?

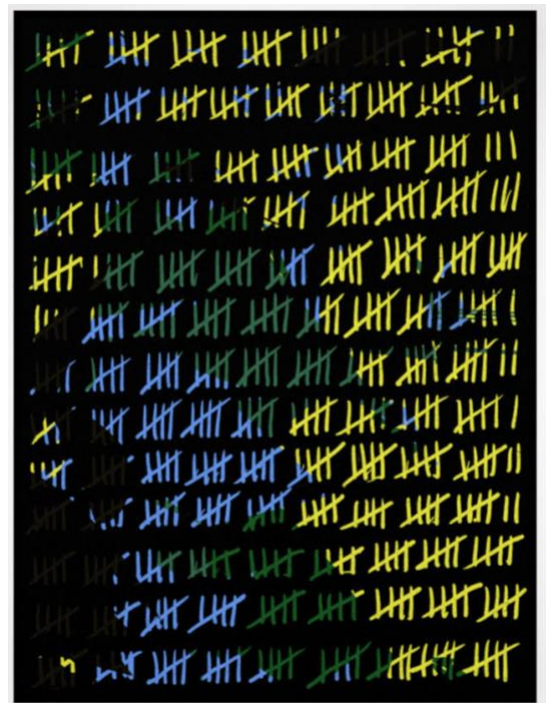
These days, I try to keep my practice from radically changing from work-to-work or body-of-work. However, I started out painting figurative self-portrait work during my BFA, and then I got really into the idea of *plein air* landscape painting. Around the same time, I got back into painting fantasy miniatures (an older hobby of mine from when I was a kid), and was thinking that I would set up miniature *plein air* type scenes in an effort to stay inside, but I just found the model building so interesting. I started figuring out how to make lighting for my models, which got me into electronic engineering – through that I started using Arduino and learned how to code. About 5 years ago I started thinking about how I could hard-code a painting, which is essentially the way that I'm working now. The evolutions in my work are unfolding slower now because I've developed this process that I would like to explore more deeply.

What are some of the electronic machine experiments you have worked on?

I'd say the biggest one is a CNC painting machine. I often use a vinyl cutter to make stencils. I physically apply the paint through the vinyl stencil which is very satisfying, but unfortunately that process is really wasteful. What I love about the vinyl is that it gives a machine's touch. There's a lot of things that can't be done by hand and that's something I'm really fascinated by, so I'm trying to accomplish that through building a kind of CNC drawing machine. At the moment it works, but it's not quite as smooth as I would like.

How do you play in your work?

I'm really interested in "painter moves," I consider painting to be open source. I often will try to figure out how an artist creates a certain line or texture. I'll often try to recreate these gestures and through doing so will come up with something else. I also try to use up any spare paint by making draw-down ghosts on paper from paint blobs, or trying out these different strokes or "painter moves."



Is there anything specific that you are hoping to communicate in your work?

Right now I'm really interested in stoner paintings, wizards and stuff and I've been subtly putting that into some paintings. Mostly I'm hoping my process and ideas come across really clearly. The act of painting it is often more interesting than the end result. I'm trying to contextualize this odd time where all these different technologies are emerging to either make our lives easier or to complicate things.

Is there something creative that you do for yourself that you find restorative?

I paint miniature models! In junior high my parents got me a little model kit and I got really into building them then painting them and eventually that led me to start painting paintings.

Can you talk a bit about your exploration in colour and mixing your own pigments?

I don't mix my own pigments yet, but I've built a colour mixer which consists of four tubes operated by a pump system, and then I use the [virtual paint mixer](#) on Golden's website, so this colour mixer I made is basically a physical version of that. Most of the colours in my work are random, I'll produce sixty images digitally and then select one that I want to paint. I tend to use synthetic colours as they relate more to my content and they also tend to be more vibrant and long lasting. I'm also really interested in fluid dynamics – for example I often think about the way graffiti peels on oil based paint - it can be really beautiful.

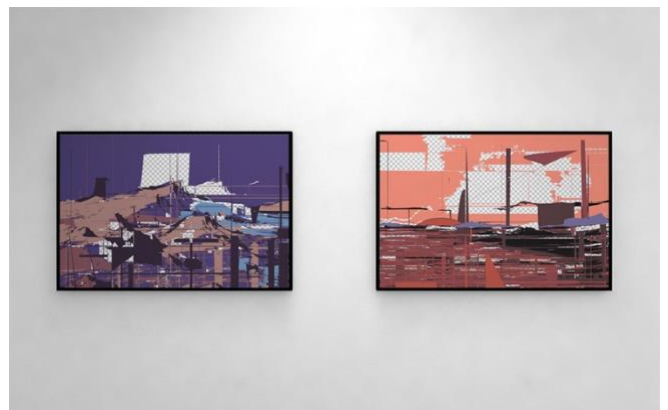


Do you have a secret life hack?

In general, taking things apart and seeing how they work, reverse engineering things. I've done that since I was a kid, I used to take apart toys and later the VCR. I feel like I find understanding through the act of making. A lot of my work is about adding context to certain things in the world.

Do you see your paintings as a kind of screen?

I've had this question before, in my painting course last semester. Throughout my work I try to maintain the same sizes of support surfaces, these sizes correlate to different kinds of aspect ratios, for example a computer screen, tablet, etc.



What's the best piece of advice you have been given?

Hang in there! A guest artist in my undergrad told my class that pretty much everyone in this year is going to quit in the next ten years. He recommended playing the long game when it comes to art, don't sacrifice your ideals for a quick success. And it's true, out of my class there's not many of us left!

Questionnaire:

Do you have a recurring dream/nightmare in your sleep?

I often dream about the ability to levitate, usually this starts with some kind of gravity change until I realize I'm the one controlling it!

Best places to "accidentally" bump into you?

Probably along Laurier Ave sometime between 11am - 3pm.

What historical figure, living or dead, would you most like to have dinner with?

Michael Faraday

If Hollywood made a movie about your life, who should play you?

Dean Haglund

If you could reincarnate as a plant, which one would you be?

Judging from this summer most likely *Humulus lupulus*

If you could be texture, what would it be?

Blue muppet fur!

Which superpower would you like to have?

Teleportation

Do you believe that alternate universes exist, and if yes, what universe are you currently in?

It's hard to know! I do believe in the Mandela Effect - I swear Pikachu had a black tipped tail when I was a kid.

Is there any artist that you would like to share a studio with?

Tom Sachs - seems like a fun time

If a wizard ambushed you in the park and made you choose, what category of food would you give life and forced to keep as your best friend?

Gummy Venus from the Simpsons

What is the oldest piece of art that you have kept of your own creation?

A sketchbook of Dungeons and Dragons maps from Junior High. My first attempt at watercolour.

What is the most bizarre thing that you've ever done that most other people probably have not done?

Jerry Springer taping followed by a screening of Mathew Barney's *Drawing Restraint 9*.