

## THREE GENERATIONS LOST IN THE SAME DREAM

A conversation with Daniel Crawford

Hadi Jamali

- *What are you working on these days?*

I have been focusing on a stop-motion animation project composed of a collection of family heirlooms and found objects combining drawn, cut out, and puppet animation. I move between that and painting murals on the walls of my apartment studio.

- *You have detail-oriented, mixed media, and multilayered works. What are all these details coming from, and how do you manage these numerous elements?*

My pieces often begin with a series of thematic gestures. The creation of a piece could be spurred by a lyric of poetry, a newly discovered painting, or a striking encounter with a person or landscape. Often I just need to start making based on an intuition until something becomes a dialogue. If I have an idea forming, I need just to start something (too much analysis or reflection on a new idea can be paralyzing!). Start drawing; just start touching a piece of clay. Then I begin to see the things that I can react to. I need to start making, and then I can have a conversation with myself through the piece. And once I see enough of it, maybe I can begin to take it to others and ask questions and receive criticism.

I often go for walks, where I weave in and out of as many pathways and hidden spaces I can find within several kilometers of my home. Any work I make tries to communicate the feeling of moving through or encountering landscapes teeming with energy and potential interactions; whether a film sculpture or painting the details emerges from my continued working of a piece that leaves a trace of my creative exploration. Creative influences and experiences work-themselves in overtime, creating a shifting living meaning within the pieces. I want my finished works to openly contain moments of their construction that allow the feeling of wonder and discovery to spring through the cracks. I like to work things over long periods (years in the case of some paintings) to give them a sense of personal history. The working and re-working of layers become like the secret histories embedded in the landscapes we move over every day. I want every inch of work to feel like it has a story to tell.

- *Can we say that this much detail is manageable when each work is a new generation of the previous practice or experience? I guess it can be like inhabiting a land. You have a general understanding of it, but each time you discover a new corner of it.*



A collage of images including a ruler, a person's face, a pencil, and a blue folder.

Yes, like how even as you were describing that thought and I went looking around my studio, digging through some things to find a certain book to show you where I started the idea of painting but became distracted in discovering this medal of my great grandfather's. The organization of my studio is always changing, and I don't know where certain things are. Sometimes I will suddenly remember a certain object, where is that picture or that small wood carving. It becomes a search through the micro landscapes of my studio, like the exploration of the territory. It is a way of finding new ideas through this almost constant search within my studio's shifting landscape. This creates a sense of exploration and discovery that is also present in pieces themselves. There is a territory that I am working within, formed out of experiences and creative influences, that manifests as the landscape of my studio. There are always new things to find as I add new objects or materials to space, everything's meaning offering new pathways for creation as I reconfigure, rediscover, pull back, and ask more questions.

*- In your installation ((open studio)Revival of the Storyteller) you staged different objects, screens, and speakers in which viewers need to turn around to discover various components of the installation. Even in your paintings, we can see tons of details that can not be seen in one glance. Do you think you recreate multi-layer and labyrinthine landscapes in your projects, similar to what you have around you, your neighborhood, or your studio?*

My hope is that the excitement of experimentation and discovery is present in the final piece. The installation at the open house worked well for communicating this feeling. Through the multiple projections of animation, and the use of the objects within the projections to populate the landscape of the room, there was a clear extension between the on and off screen elements, some of which directly (like a series of animation cut out multiples inside the desk) referred to the processes of creation, but also take on their own life in the installation.

*You mentioned you have a conversation with your surroundings, and this conversation feeds your work. To what extent do you think your work reflects this process and how much control you think you have on the interaction of the viewers of your works?*

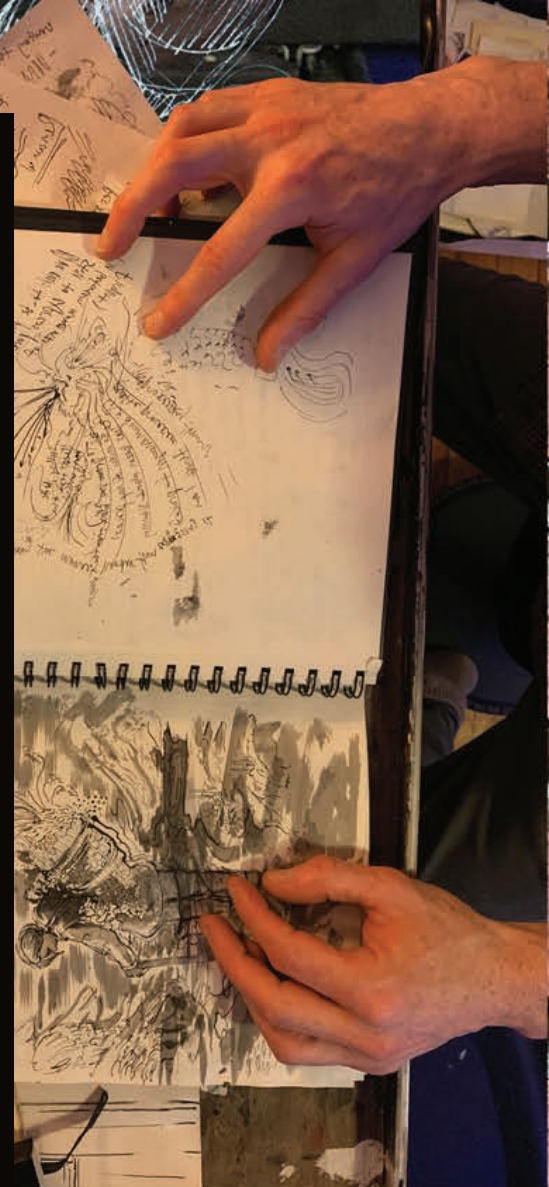
My work is always grappling with personal themes that I explore through larger symbolic gestures, giving them an almost myth or parable-like quality. The pieces themselves are the representation of a driving uncertainty or sense of wonder. I invite the viewer to generate their questioning narrative as they encounter my work. Each piece has its internal logic, but any answers viewers arrive at will require work and attention and ultimately be their own. In a way, I am quietly and lovingly demanding of my viewer, the minutia and detail in my work ask for deep and careful observation. It shares my own experience of exploration and discovery in the creation of the piece if it is successful. The more detail and layering I add to a piece, the more life it has, and the more life it has, the less I am in control of the life it will take on through someone's encounter with it.


*- What makes you go digging the past? Sometimes when we ask questions about the past, we need to fill a gap in the present. Something that we need for now, so it is not purely discovering the past but making a conversation with it. Why do you recall things from the past, and what do you want from it?*

I think when we look to the past, we are often looking for a pattern that illuminates our own contemporary experiences. You are given incite into your world through feeling deeply recognized by someone who's never seen you. When you discover a text, an image, or a piece of music, and you say, "Wow, you describe this feeling that I had, and now I understand it better." It feels like you are clasping hands with someone through time and sharing that spark of wonder together. I think the artwork is always about communication. It wants to say things that cannot be said through new forms of language. When an artist struggles to find new ways to communicate to the world around them, they look to the past for others who have done this, finding kinship to help them struggle. This creative struggle echoes into the future. Looking to the past helps one understand their part in the ongoing development of innovative communication, the conversation of art through time.

*- I know you have been teaching art for years. Can we say teaching is another way of providing an occasion to make a communication/-connection between past and present? The same tendency that you have in your art projects.*

That is a great thought! There are teachers whose lessons live inside me now and influence the way I make and act in the world, whose advice still guides, reassures, and challenges me. When I am teaching, I am trying to provide students with new tools for exploring their ideas as the teachers I valued most did for me. In teaching, I love having to explain concepts to different ways of learning. Each time you share a creative tool or technique with someone, their questions define new aspects of it and its process that you could not have seen without their particular incite into unfolding its riddle. The moment you see that someone understands a new idea that you had to understand in a new way to communicate it to them is one of the driving factors of all my work. I know just like some of my teachers, an imaginary version of me lives inside some students I have worked with. The process of sharing the knowledge I have gained from my mentors, like my work, echoes the past to understand the present in the hopes of offering new past understandings to the future.





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

*Yes, being back in elementary school as an adult, because I had missed a credit.*

Best places to “accidentally” bump into you?

*Mt. Royal about 200 m north of the Mt. Royal cross there is a fence you can hop to get to a wonderful lookout where people sometimes have gatherings but is also fairly secluded. A nice thinking spot, and a nice spot to run into curious stranger(s).*

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

*Jorge Luis Borges. If I was lucky, he would tell me bedtime stories after dinner.*

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

*David Lynch.*

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

*A walking Onion.*

If you could be texture, what would it be?

*Inclined twisted moss.*

Which superpower would you like to have?

*To be able to turn my fingers into drawing and painting tools that can produce any pigment or medium.*

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

*Yes. This one.*

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

*David Altmejd.*

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

*An apple.*

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

*A drawing of my childhood home when I was 4.*

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

*My brother and a few of our friends explored a network of subterranean storm drains leading to a drainage pond when we found an uncovered manhole as young teens.*