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Crossing borders 008: Animalitoland

Zoé Bélisle-Springer Jul 5, 2015

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "traveling" means "to go from one place to another, as on a trip; journey." There are tons of ways to travel: one can stay in hotels, use the Couchsurfing network, apply for a work visa, go on vacation, go alone or with friends... the options are infinite. In whichever...

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About us

Fondée en 2011 par la Convention internationale de Graffiti Under Pressure, Fresh Paint est un projet alternatif qui revitalise des espaces vacants pour les transformer en espace culturel temporaire. Étant à la fois un lieu d'exposition, éducatif et événementiel, Fresh Paint a pour but de trouver l'équilibre entre des activités culturelles et éducatifs tout en gardant comme objectif premier la promotion de la culture urbaine.

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The link is offline but the interview has been preserved as originally published at

<http://www.freshpaintgallery.ca/blog/crossing-borders-008-animalitoland/>

[FP] You have a very colorful professional and educational background. How has working as a designer and working for video games influenced your way of producing your art ?

[A] Design gave me structure, I look for harmony between shapes, colors are the translation of a certain mood or personality, everything has a purpose. Then, working for videogames and animation gave me a lot of speed and I became looser. I think the best is somewhere in between those extremes, being able to build a structure but at the same time have the freedom to play and flow with it.

[FP] What would you consider being one of the most important things you've learned at school and one of the most important things you have learned on the streets painting? Why?

[A] From university I stick with a very basic thing: design is communication. The message will define every aspect of the aesthetic. In my personal work 99% of the time is just a feeling I can't express otherwise. But even if it's difficult to explain, there's always something behind the image. That's a simple thing some people don't understand: I can't tell you the amount of times I got requests to build an image that just "looks cool". The best thing from the street I guess is connecting with people. I had no idea what a gigantic snowball I was getting into just by painting outdoors. I met people from the neighbourhoods who shared their thoughts about the wall, and that's so much interactive and different from museum or galleries. I also connected with other artists, once you paint with someone you mostly end up being friends. And the diversity is amazing, from people who have money and academic backgrounds to those who grew up in the street (and everyone in between), you can find them painting in the same street. Walls don't mean the same thing for all of us, but is the place where everyone gets together. Also when I started travelling, I realized that you can go to a place you've never been, and find yourself welcomed by strangers just because you both paint, It's like a world wide family.

[FP] What would you consider being greatest accomplishment?

[A] Leave my comfort zone, quit the studio job and travel to try new things. I'm thankful to my husband who encouraged me to do this, we're both currently exploring and trying to figure out what comes next.

[FP] Have you ever had any troubles with authorities when painting outdoor murals? What kind of risks are there to get arrested in your hometown for painting illegally?

[A] No, the worst thing that happened is that they made me leave, I was never afraid of violence or serious legal issues in my country. A friend and I once painted an abandoned wall, 2 blocks away from a police station. We set all the spraycans on the ground and waited for 10 minutes, to see if police cars stopped. No one told us anything, so we just started painting. Spent the whole day from morning to night painting happily. I really miss that freedom.

[FP] Can you describe what the street art scene is like in Buenos Aires? Is it everywhere like so in Argentina?

[A] You can paint all day long, so that allows you to do big detailed walls, and take the time to get to know the neighbours, who often approach to talk and maybe share some food or drinks. Public spaces like parks are completely covered with graffiti, some pieces don't even last one day. When I wanted something to last I started ringing bells and asking neighbours if it was ok to paint their walls. That's all it takes if the police comes you just say you have permission, you don't need a legal paper. I think that freedom encourages more people who has nothing to do with graffiti culture, to go out. So you can find all kinds of styles out there. Buenos Aires as the capital city is very crowded. In other cities maybe there's a little less amount of painters , but at the same time as smaller communities I think people tend to be more friendly. But Argentina is a huge country, I can't speak for all of it.

[FP] In a past interview for We Heart Magazine, you have once said moving to Spain and meeting different artists from across the world made it possible for you to find your Latin American features. In your own perspective, what would you consider that being?

[A] It's difficult to describe. What I'm seeing as a first shock is that in Europe there's a lot of resources. There are specialized schools, events where you can meet huge artists and professionals, and also a ridiculous variety of specific tools for whatever task you want to perform. So on one hand I'm sad we don't have those opportunities back there. But on the other hand I see people move inside of big structures, taking things for granted. So I think the "latin thing" is to have no certainties, improvise with whatever you have at hand. If you want to become something that doesn't even have a name, you just make it. You make your own tools and your own path, study on the go, trying to feed your head by researching and learning from experience. And all that chaos is a good place for creativity.

[FP] While you are currently living in Spain and experienced the culture shocks there must of been, what are the main differences in terms of difficulties for an artist living and working in Argentina versus Spain?

[A] I think I've just answered this. But I can add one more thing: In Argentina most people give up artistic careers because they think they won't be able to make a living (I was one of them). And I don't mean to earn a lot of money, I mean to survive. So if you don't work, you don't live. I see European people who don't have jobs and yet the state supports them, so if they are not working, they are studing or travelling. That, in addition to the resources you can find here, looks like a more relaxed way to decide to become an artist.

[FP] In your opinion, what are some solutions that could be put in place to help artists out live a good career? Is company sponsoring and festivals enough?

[A] -I'm sorry, I couldn't possibly answer this now because I'm struggling with it myself. I'll definitely tell you if/when I find solutions. I'm working on it :)

[FP] What do you miss most about the local street art scene in Buenos Aires?

[A] I miss the day-to-day thing. The freedom to just grab my bike, some spraycans, and go. Look for a spot to paint all day long without worrying about the police. Painting with my friends, getting to know the neighbours, drinking and eating with them (sometimes painting on a weekend can end up like a real picnic). I'm now living in the center of Madrid, I know that if I'd live a little further from the city I might find more peaceful places, but I'm here to try new things, so..

[FP] I have seen blogs on the internet mistake for a male artist. How do you feel about that?

[A] I don't really mind. I know there's a prejudice that women don't paint well and things like that which are completely wrong, but at the same time I don't like being put in a "female category". Keeping genders apart might work in sports, but in art it has no sense. I could be a man, a woman, even a transgender. It doesn't matter, I treat everyone the same way so I expect the same back.

[FP] How hard do you feel it is working as a female artist in a stereotyped man's world?

[A] I think there's people everywhere who don't know how to communicate with the opposite sex without acting silly. But it has never stopped me from doing my job, so I try not to pay much attention when I come across them. I've always been surrounded by guys, since I was a little girl and played football with my friends, then comics, animation, videogames, graffiti. I usually forget I'm different from them. And yes, it happens sometimes that they are rude to me and it's really annoying. But it's usually before I start working, so it's just prejudice. Then things cool off and somehow I always find nice people to talk to from one artist to another.

[FP] What message you wish to deliver through your art is most important to you?

[A] I don't have one big statement, I usually translate what I'm feeling at the moment into images. So I think the big picture would be to allow yourself to be moved and surprised by small things in the daily life, and be free to play with your imagination in order to transform your reality.

[FP] What will you be most focusing on for the next few months?

[A] I want to make the most out of Europe before returning home. So I'll try to travel and paint in different cities, to meet and interact with the vast diversity of cultures here.
