BLM 6 Teacher Resource

Grade 8, Interview with artist and ceramicist Shane Norrie
“From A to Zine: Lesson 2 – Calling All Artists”

Background:

Jack and Charlotte are Grade 8 students in Stratford, ON. They chose local artist Shane Norrie to interview.

Jack’s family had a ceramic pot made by Norrie. Both Jack and Charlotte viewed Shane Norrie’s website, and saw some of his work at the Gardiner Museum, and at the Canvas Gallery. They also found a video from the Stratford Art Gallery about the artist, which explains how his style has developed.

http://www.shanenorrie.com

http://www.gardinermuseum.on.ca/

http://canvasgallery.ca/images/artists/norrie/Norrie.htm

For the video, join www.vimeo.com (free) and do a search for Shane Norrie, the video will come up.

Jack and Charlotte’s interview with artist and ceramicist SHANE NORRIE

When did you KNOW that you were going to be an artist?

Growing up, art was always my strongest subject. As a young child, I had wanted to be an artist. It wasn’t until after my post-secondary education was finished (advertising and graphic design) that I decided to pursue visual arts as a full-time career.

What or who were your inspirations?

I had many artists who inspired me, for many different reasons, when I was younger and presently. Jonathan Adler is an interior designed and potter. His career has probably inspired the ‘marketing’ direction of my career the most. His work is used on television sets, and in mainstream decorating and interior design magazines.

The work of Canadian sculptor Peter Powning has inspired my ceramic aesthetic. His work appears to be relic-like and mysterious.

In terms of paintings and aesthetics, I love the work of Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Patricia Larsen, to name a few.

Is there another artist who influenced you? Or was your mentor?

My friend Shirley Clifford has been a strong influence in my work and in my life. She has been a mentor to me.

What other artists practice in your style?

Hard to say … there is such a range and variations of styles, that it is impossible to match a style exactly. In terms of ceramic work, artists who have a similar aesthetic may be: Peter Powning, Kayo O’Young, John Chalke, Mark Chatterley, Laurie Rolland, Lesley McInally, etc.

I know that you do ceramics and paintings, so maybe you can answer some of our questions with a two-part answer, or choose the best example.

How much does it cost YOU to make an artwork? What are your expenses?

Pottery: this is a complicated questions. For ceramics, the expenses are high, and also, one needs a lot of equipment. You need to equip a studio first, which can be fairly costly, your raw materials and operating expenses.

Here is a breakdown of some of the expense and equipment costs for me:

Renovate a studio: $10,000; Kiln: $6,000; pottery wheel: $1,800; Clay is $30 per box, and chemicals for glazes etc. range from very inexpensive to very expensive.

You also have hydro, heat, water, delivery and travel costs to pick up supplies, loss of work in the firing and drying process, and various other utilities to account for. Most of all, labour is the biggest factor for pottery, as it is such a hands-on process. Another big expense for pottery is shipping and packing supplies, etc.

Painting: For my painting, you need less equipment and space up front, but expenses such as art supplies and framing can be very costly. Good quality brushes and paints can be expensive. Paints can be as much as $40 a tube, canvas, for example 48x48”, would be about $100.

Framing is definitely the biggest expense. You could spend so much on framing …. It varies tremendously. A simple, black floater frame that was used in my Gallery Stratford Exhibition retails for approximately $700.

How did you know how much money to charge for your work?

Pottery: starting out, I got advice from other ceramic artists and gallery owners. Now, I price my pieces on a variety of factors, but I try to keep it consistent. Price would be reflected in size, number of times it was fired, complexity of the piece.

Paintings: I worked with my galleries to come up with a pricing scale. I now have a formula for pricing unframed work, based on size of the piece, and then framing is added on top of that, as it can vary greatly.

Have your prices changed over your career?

Definitely! As you become more well-known and ‘in-demand’ your prices can increase. I am careful to only increase my prices when the timing or market dictates or justifies an increase. I have worked closely with my galleries on this, in order to keep my pricing very consistent and affordable. Many times I have seen artists and friends who are artists begin to sell work, and increase their prices dramatically once their work is selling, without good reason. They price themselves out of the market, and it is very difficult to lower your prices once they are increased. You would have many very angry collectors if this were to happen.

What is the most your artwork has sold for?

The largest paintings I do are 4’x6’ and those pieces were framed with an expensive frame and they were sold for $5,700 CAN.

Sculptural ceramic boats sell for $2,350 CAN.

Where do you sell your work?

I sell my work through galleries and through my home studio for occasional open house events. I used to sell at outdoor exhibitions and shows as well, but not anymore.

How much do you have to pay your agent or a gallery?

Commercial galleries commission ranges anywhere from 25%-50%, depending on your negotiated rate.

How much profit do you make? Is it double what your expenses were? What is the percentage?

Hard to answer this one exactly, as it depends on many factors.

Do you earn a full-time living as an artist? How long did it take you to become successful? What did you have to do to supplement your income in the early days?

Yes, I earn a very good living as an artist. I have been selling work since I was 16 (I am 35 now) and have been working as an artist full-time since about 2001. In the early days, I taught art classes as well at a local art centre to supplement my income.

What sort of risks does it take to become an artist? Do you have to cut back on anything that you’d like to do in order to be an artist?

There are lots of risks to being an artist, but I think that is the same with anything that you pursue. The obvious risk is the financial risk, and lack of a steady pay check, but that is not an issue now. I feel that the more effort you put into something, the more you will succeed.

I’ve never really thought of being an artist as a business. Is it worth it? Would you change anything?

Is it worth it? OF COURSE! I think that there is much more to life than just a steady pay check every two weeks. What could be better than waking up and walking 10 steps to your job, doing what you love to do everyday, making your own hours, taking vacation whenever you feel like it, and being in complete control of your career?