

Robert Priseman

Interviews Wendy Elia

RP: Have you always thought of yourself as an artist, or was it something which developed later?

WE: I was a musician before I moved into the visual arts, so yes I always considered myself an artist, just swapped one art form for another and went to art school at age 25. Which was considered a very mature student in those days.

RP: Who would you cite as the most influential artist on your practice if you could only pick one person?

WE: I started as a figurative painter working from life in an age of abstraction so all those figurative painters like Courbet, Manet and of course Lucian Freud. I was not educated in art history so was not aware of all those wonderful female figurative artists until I educated myself in the 90's. My generation was raised on Gombrich's *The Story of Art* you see.

RP: How many paintings do you make a year on average?

WE: I make 2 or 3 large paintings a year, as a lot of thinking goes into them. And a lot of 'life' stuff tends to suck up my time. I have been adding a few smaller pieces to my repertoire as well.

RP: If you could select one painting by yourself as a work which sums up your philosophy to art, which one would it be, and why?

WE: As I work in series I would have to pick a few favourites from a few series which explore particular issues and narratives. So here are a few. From the *Cat's Cradle* series *Five Stones* from the *What is Truth* series *Tell it as it is* and from the *Half Naked* series of which you have one *Fighter (Alex)*. From the *The Visit* series *The Visit V (Mary)* and from the *Where are We Now* series inspired by *Gentileschi*.

The painting of the same name. *Dance to the music of Time 2* is a much misunderstood work which is the culmination of 20 years of work and close to my heart. *Carmen and Luisa* from the *Throne* series as well. Trying to be sincere in what you do is my philosophy. Very hard thing to be.

RP: You set up the feminist arts group Femcels. Do you think a separation out of the sexes in art is beneficial, and if so, why?

WE: No comment.

RP: Do you think a man can ever paint a portrait of a woman again? Or going forward should only women paint women and consequentially each gender only paint individuals of their same identifying gender?

WE: “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn”

RP: How long on average do you spend painting one of your large canvases like the work *Judith*?

WE: *Judith* was painted from life so probably took about 12, 4 hour sessions.

RP: Do you work exclusively from life or make use of photos for reference?

WE: After 40 years of painting directly from life I have finally learned enough to work from photos. Luckily as during lockdowns that is what I had to do. So now I work almost exclusively from photos and time will tell! Though I intend to start working from life again as that kind of intensity and looking cannot happen with a two dimensional image.

RP: What is the hardest thing about being a painter?

WE: Being an unsuccessful one! Ha ha. Finding time to do it. Then finding time to market it. It is a whole identity. Questioning why you do it. I think Margaret Atwood said something about the need to leave something/say something / be heard.... like a dog pissing on trees.

RP: If you could go back in time and give your 21 year old self some advice, what would it be?

WE: Believe in yourself and your vision Don't listen or need or ask to anyone's comments about your work and get on with it.

RP: What do you consider to be your greatest achievement and why?

WE: My greatest achievement is the fact that I am still here and still painting.

Interview completed on 20 June 2023