

Robert Priseman

Interviews Kelly Jayne

RP: You are both an artist and an Art Psychotherapist who holds a PhD. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about that please? What is the difference and what is it that appeals about the two aspects so much to you?

KJ: Thanks for that question, Robert. I always refer to myself primarily as an artist. I can remember drawing pictures from as little as 3 years old! Its a huge part of who I am. Skipping forwards to the time when I was achieving success as an artist, winning awards and exhibiting internationally, I wondered how I could use art to support others. Art making has always helped me to process thoughts and feelings at times that have been both challenging and amazing. I had the urge to support others in accessing this process. I began to work with vulnerable people in mental health settings, using art to support people and delivering community projects. I saw immediate benefit to participants so explored further how I could engage more deeply with this process of helping people. I discovered Art Psychotherapy as a profession and enrolled onto the training in 2009. Since then, I have worked in a range of settings, supporting lots of people by introducing art into their care plans and seeing amazing results. I gained my PhD in Art Psychotherapy and complex psychological trauma, and am currently about to roll out an internationally validated treatment manual as a pilot clinical trial in the NHS. I am also proud to have founded the first and only Art Psychotherapy MSc Apprenticeship training in the world.

The difference between being an artist and an Art Psychotherapist is that as an artist I can explore my inner landscape and indulge in my own expressions and explorations, in response to myself, and to the world. I can use art to understand what I feel and why, and to process and work through my own psychological material. As an Art Psychotherapist I help others to do the same.

RP: That's a really interesting distinction between the personal and the communal approaches to art Kelly. It reminds me how Aristotle, in his collected work the *Poetics*, describes how works of dramatic art act as a form of catharsis to our emotions. This has always felt true to me in the visual arts too. That we hold emotions inside of ourselves and then they need to come out. In painting we can manifest them in some way and sooth ourselves. Does this ring true for you?

KJ: Completely. Although I do often wonder about the blend of emotional experiences and what belongs to whom and when. In the world of psychotherapy, we explore transference and countertransference. The rising awareness of what psychic material is our own or that of the

patient. I use my own art making to identify where my own material sits, or to see what I'm holding that isn't mine. An image can reveal so much, the meaning can be endless, and the more one looks, the more one sees. Furthermore, Carl Jung would say, that which is not processed from within does not disappear, but it transforms and changes shape until we listen to it. The convenience of repression can serve a short spell of relief. However, this is an elusion that all is well. Being able to use art, and I mean all of the arts, is a perfect channel for enabling the flow of feelings. It stops the blockages and adds air to the soul.

RP: Your own paintings are often semi abstract watercolours of human body parts, eyes floating on a page, or parts of torsos. Can you explain a little of your thinking? How do these images emerge for you and what inspires them?

KJ: I work without a brief other than to open my inner world and invite what is waiting to emerge. I don't know what my paintings mean or why I paint them when I am in the process. I dip into a state of flow (beta brain wave) and only when I have finished do I see the image with an analytical lens. Having had 15 years of Jungian Analysis and using my images for reflection, I understand I am capturing or recalling material (emotional experiences) that I have taken from the world around me, or received within the Art Psychotherapy work I deliver. I am interested in moments one can experience with a stranger in a crowd, the connection that is raw and knowing, then gone in a second. One can access a person's inner world more profoundly in that moment, than years of being acquainted with someone. I am interested in the centre of a person that sits behind the many layers or masks/roles we all play. And I am also interested in how or where that sits within. I paint eyes, faces, and bodies as locations where this material may sit. I aim not to create like for like versions of an external person, but to capture the essence of their emotional experience behind their layers. There is a paradox in that this is my own process and therefore my interpretation or translation. But, referring again to Carl Jung, the collective consciousness explores the notion that we are all part of an endless landscape.

RP: You create a very vivid picture of connecting to people on an emotional level. I'm curious, do you paint every day, or is it something you use as a form of meditation alongside your life?

KJ: I don't paint every day, but I do imagine paint, and I paint in my dreams. When I come to painting, it pours out of me as I've been preparing in my imagination. I'm a big fan of doodling and journalling. I do this most days. I will often make doodles with my eyes closed. It is an amazing process to see the image present itself as it has been created from an intuitive source.

RP: That's so interesting, Francis Bacon described something similar in his approach to painting – that images just appeared to him. When I look at your paintings, I feel they are like

glimpses of the imagination. A window into someone else's mind. How does that sound to you and what do you feel you are communicating in your paintings? Is there a core philosophy you wish to communicate?

KJ: I like to see it as glimpses of the psyche (aka soul or 'self') that others allow me to see, or that I catch in moments when the layers fall away temporarily. But my process is also about my own response, how the feelings of another person can sit in my eyes, face, or my body. And I am conscious that the feelings I hold of another person are generally given when they are not wanted by the giver. Painting helps me to know what mine is and what is of someone else. I often wonder how I might experience the world, and myself, if I wasn't able to sift through it all and have a tidy up. My paintings explore this process. I always find it interesting when my paintings are described as sad, or disturbing. I like to see all feelings as essential parts of our experience. Feelings are like indicators of our internal maps. They help us navigate and move around, make steps. It is not unusual for people to avoid or delay feelings that are less pleasurable, and we are often encouraged to feel happy, grateful, see the positive side of things. I can understand how this may feel like the right approach. But I do wonder about the emotional wellbeing of our society as a whole and how beneficial an internal tidy up might be. I hope that when people look at my paintings, there is a sense of permission or generalising of feeling. Even a recognition of one's own internal anguish or joy.

RP: I think I feel that when looking at your paintings Kelly. They speak to something deep and somehow beyond words.

Interview completed on 16 November 2024