

Avenger - Marc Dennis Paints The World

By Olivia Daane

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A patron of the arts of note introduces me to Marc Dennis. I get the immediate feeling Marc is up to the challenge of an interview. Being in the circle of his energy, his exuberance is like being shot out of a LIFE cannon. I am laughing in seconds and wondering if this Johnny Depp look-a-like can paint. He can. I would go so far as to call him a savant. Not only technical prowess at his bequest, but that je ne sais quoi of gesture and intention that makes his realism breathe and makes us hold ours. His works freeze time and stimulate the mind. They stun. He believes in animal spirits and our divine connectedness. Marc drew nonstop as a child and continues to fill sketchbooks as an adult, “to better understand my world and to mystify it more...to give voice to the voiceless,” he stresses, his tone honest and urgent. His first models were lizards found in one of his childhood home bases, the El Yunque rainforest of Puerto Rico. “Anoles and Iguanas. They just didn’t move,”



he jokes. His humor another gift that has helped him take in the contradictions in life, the beautiful-ugly, and help us all see it without crumbling. Marc wants to show us his world, our world and to make it as magical and powerful as the one he inhabits with his preternatural vision and paint. His words will speak for him as relentlessly as his paintings.

Olivia Daane (OD): What inspires you in nature?

Marc Dennis (MD): Forests. I love the density...the extreme tactility of leaves brushing your face, your body. There's more mystery in the forest than anywhere else in the world.

OD: Who are your mentors? Who started you on this path?

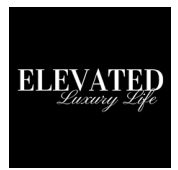
MD: I look up to my parents. My dad worked hard. My mom is the best listener in my life. I went to school at UT, Austin. I hung out with Peter Saul and had conversations. But, no one ever taught me a technique. I'm very much alone with my methods. I learned to paint on my own by looking at Caravaggio, Titian, Velazquez, Goya, Manet. We had imaginary conversations. My studio is my sanctuary. When I go in to paint, I'm well-prepared. Each painting is a speech and I have a blueprint.

OD: You are such an energized person. When and how do you calm, collect and restore to parent Zayla (9), Azev (7) and prepare for the painstaking and time-rich painting process?

MD: Just before falling asleep. My brain's still fighting. It's saying "Dude, I can still do this. Stay up!" But my body's saying "You know what brain? Chill out." I'm a vivid dreamer. My dreams are like cheap entertainment.

OD: What is your best quality? What is your biggest challenge?

MD: I'm generous, giving. Challenges? I'm always challenged. I have a devil and an angel on my shoulder. I don't like ambiguity. I am indecisive until I commit and then I'm a Navy Seal. I go in and get out.



OD: What mystifies you?

MD: I am so mystified by human behavior. That's it. I am so mystified by humans. I much prefer to watch animals, other animals, deer, alligators, turtles even...than to watch humans interact. I'm not that one to ask why don't we all get along? I understand why we don't all get along. It's so obvious. I believe in the mythologies that have been created by aboriginal peoples about how we are related to other animals. Maybe they (other people) don't get it or maybe they don't know how to talk about it. I believe we are all connected: connections to other animals, to stars, moon, pulls of the earth. There's something primordial being human that we need to be more in touch with. It's silly to me to push that aside.

OD: If you were not an artist, what would you be?

MD: A lawyer because I love to debate and argue. I love to take care of the good guy and make sure the bad guy sinks. I have a relentless, restless but very focused approach to just living. I love information, setting people straight and getting schooled. I love being taught. I love learning. I love to share. I'll never stop.

OD: So where do you dream of going? What's your refuge?

MD: Every time I go into a forest, I feel as though I should never leave. Like I should find a little place to settle down. I like buffer zones and they usually exist in my mind. I love spending time alone. It's time to sort your inner self from your outer self.

OD: Where do you go next in real time?

MD: I head from ArtAspen and ArtCrush to Houston for an art fair in October, then I have a solo show in Dallas, Nov 17, a solo show in Palm Desert and another in Vienna, Austria in the spring. One of my works is being made into a VR experience to animate and create an alternate reality in one of my paintings. It's going to be a dense, epic journey. Marc's urge to right what is wrong is palpable. He moves intensely, with an internal compass; with a strong sense of justice. He knows what he calls, "the limits of being human."



He is a noted Holocaust scholar and professor. He hates unfairness. His painted universe is real. It is a beautiful world. It is a scary world. A gorgeous capture - memento mori. He didn't wait around in life and he never will. He found the tools required for his relentless pursuit by going to the source like a time traveler. He lives with that devil and angel on each shoulder. Like the putti of the High Renaissance, they float above him steering his deft hand away from ambiguity and into paintings that mirror the divine music on his playlist. Despite the grandeur of it all, Marc is the least likely showman. He cannot help but swallow us up with his canvases. He does not need to be this generous with himself or his paint. But he is. He could go hide in his buffer zones, the quiet forest. But he doesn't. He stays. He sticks with us. Pushes our buttons. Schools us.

As his visions do.

On his bedside table: Uncontrollable Beauty, The Reason for Flowers, Nature and Its Symbols

On his playlist: The Medieval chants of Anonymous 4, Stephen Colbert, Shark Tank reruns

Olivia is a painter (known for her butterfly series begun in 2008), art consultant, songwriter, wordsmith, mom and delegate to the GES. A full time Aspenite since 1997, she spends as much time as she can in the mountains and taking in all the enriching programs Aspen has to offer.

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