

Rhys Foster

Interviewee: Morgan Cooper

Date of Interview: 4/20/21

The Secrets of a Sympathetic Artist: An Interview with Morgan Cooper

On April 20th, 2021, I had the pleasure of interviewing Morgan Cooper about her aspirations as a studio artist. Finishing her final semester at Texas State, she has developed an all-around artistic style that focuses on her progressive ideals of compassion and collective struggles. I was instantly intrigued by her background and proficiency in oil painting and sculptures.

Morgan has applied her imaginative style onto the subject of societal conflicts that are consistently isolating individuals in America. By accepting the idea of living up to one's full potential, Morgan has developed a personal theme that focuses on experience, empathy, and freedom of expression. Her theory on the human potential and open-mindedness is why she often expands on her materials, and is not confined to category alone. Her journey of self discovery as an artist has made her unconventional, and allows her viewers to interpret their own ideas of abandoning institutionalized rules that often limit our true potential.

Where are you from?

I am originally from Dallas, but after community college I moved to Austin. I wanted to stay in Austin because it was very artistic and the people there were so imaginative. In Dallas, there was always this pressure to be a little more conventional, and the first time I went to Austin, I was like “whoa” people can actually be creative and feel free to be themselves. And from a young age I was on a mission of self discovery, I wanted to go outside of societal norms. I transferred to Austin Community College (ACC) for a few semesters and then came to Texas State. I felt really

encouraged by friends in Austin to attend Texas State because of its well known contemporary arts program. That was back in 2012, and after that I took a break from school.

What have you been doing since 2012?

I have a little bit of an interesting story. I came to Texas State in 2012 and then I really started finding myself outside of painting and becoming more interested in 3-Dimensional conception of ideas. So now, I am mostly working as a soft sculptural artist. In 2016 I took a break from Texas State and actually moved to Europe and then Los Angeles. Due to the pandemic, I had the opportunity to come back to Texas State, and now I am finishing my last semester as a studio art major.

Where were you and Europe and what were you doing there?

I traveled a lot to Amsterdam and lived there twice and initially went over to work as an au pair. I was able to live there through the kinship of my grandmother, and that gave me citizenship for a year. While I was in Europe, I met a chef and was inspired to work as one. I was able to translate some of my designing skills into the creation of food. Because of that new discovery, I was

able to start working as a cook and work my way up to sous chef once I moved to Los Angeles. I still didn't have my degree yet, so somewhere in between I wanted to go back to school and eventually moved to Austin.

How did you become an artist?

So how I became an artist, well I was always into the arts from a young age. My dad was into the arts as well so I think I just had

that influence. Then I got into high school and that was when I got very involved in the arts program. In the beginning of my high school career, I was specifically interested in painting. I have always been interested in designing and curating colors and patterns, so I started to take up fashion classes outside of school. After I finished high school, I kind of focused on my future and started a two year associates program.

How did that program make you into the artist you are today?

I found a very influential professor so I really latched on to a lot of his teachings and his practices. Since he was a painter, sculptor, and a stained glass artist, I became hooked on the idea of being well educated in a lot of different mediums. My professor focused on anatomy and the human figure, and from him I learned how to depict nuances in two dimensional figures. Through the representation of art through a medium such as oil painting, I started to develop my own specific style.



What medium do you mainly use?

Well I have a 2 dimensional painting background, and I'm really interested in using transparency media, and layering techniques, but right now because the concept is more important to me, I have been trying to use materials that represent my ideas. For instance, for my senior thesis piece, I focused on addiction as a disorder onto society. I was using bags filled with sand and wrapped with tape, and attached it to a net, which was representing bundles of heroin for my addiction piece. To me, I find symbolism in materials and objects. I have an eye for certain objects but I try to keep an open mind to different techniques.

What is your creative process like?

I feel like my ideas come from a space that I create from my freedom or opinions and how I think of the world. My ideas are very unique to myself but socially necessary. Compassion and empathy are large topics in my art as well as the American society. Since I have lived outside of America, I have known what is unique to our society, and what makes us apart from others. I



wanted to focus on the byproducts that occur from being a citizen in the United States, such as addiction, family dynamics, social services, therapy, and other psychological topics that were specific to America. All of these things are intertwined into my concepts, and help motivate me into my message as an artist. When I am coming up with a new idea, I just think about which branch I am wanting to emphasize next. And through material symbolism and visualization, I am able to concentrate on a specific subject I want.

How does your work comment on social/political issues?

My senior thesis is about addiction and being a result of the American system. In other pieces I am thinking of homelessness and equality, and our shared societal factors that construct us to a certain type of final expression of ourselves. My main belief from a social standpoint is more of a spiritual one, where we are all equal, and all innocent. I believe the soul has a final potential, but when you are born into a specific life, we have restraints and conditions that we have to break in order to live up to our true potential. We are all entitled to make our own way and to reject the limitations of oppression.

How does that belief affect your style?

I would say my work is not relevant to specific political issues, but more of a social idea of freedom of expression and opinion. From an outside point of view, I am a white female who is not necessarily supposed to have an opinion on sectors of society where I am not from. So that's where my feeling of appreciating divergent thinking originates from. I have the ability to cover controversial subjects in society. And it's because of my beliefs that I focus on empathy and compassion because I want to represent larger groups. It's why I focus on empathy and compassion because I want to represent larger, victimized groups.

What are some of the emotions you like to work with?



The tangible concepts in my work are sad. I use coarse materials like sand, tar, and other heavy materials. I am trying to emote heaviness in the subjects because I often cover the uncomfortable realities of

the problems in our society. However I am always wanting the outcome of my theme to be optimistic. There is always an immense energy of hope, compassion, and empathy. Even though it looks really sad, my message is to erase that sense of loneliness. By emphasizing my art, viewers can either acknowledge unknown struggles, or feel unified by it.

If you could meet one historical figure, who would it be and why?

This is really random, but the first person who came to mind was Abraham Lincoln. I feel that he emanates the compassion that I am often trying to express. My favorite quote from him is “Whatever you are, be a good one”, which kind of just summarizes his sense of integrity and lack of judgement.

Have you ever received any negative feedback? If so, how have you responded to it?

I always got really positive feedback on my skill and handling of materials. But in my first section of school, I feel like there were some haters. The process of going to school for studio art is all about critiques, so we were constantly being criticized. Even if there wasn’t anything bad,

people were always trying to find something to judge because we all have to talk about it. The smallest negative details added up and really affected me in my early twenties. I would go home from a critique and feel really down, but back then I also didn't know how to separate myself from my artwork. And now that I am older, I have a better relationship with myself and my art, and it's more healthy now.

What skills have you developed from school and life, and how has it helped you make your art right now?

My biggest tool that I have gained is more of a mental one, and Texas State really set me up for that. The problem solving, constructive thinking, and critical thinking, are all things I have developed over the years due to school and traveling. I feel more of my hand skills have developed out of a direct response to my experience now as an artist. The materials I choose to use and visualization representation is all based on theory.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I see myself as a mother, and hopefully still creating my independent artworks and getting into galleries. I see myself having completed a 2 year MFA program, and on the brink of creating and operating my own business.

Rhys Foster, Art Critique and Writing, 2021

List of Art Work

Fig.1: Morgan Cooper, *Hose*. 2021. Mixed media 66 x 8 x 3 inches

Fig.2: Morgan Cooper, *Reaction: Addiction*. 2021. Mixed media 96 x 9 x 6 inches

Fig. 3: Morgan Cooper, *Sand*. 2021. Mixed media, variable dimensions