

## Ashley Greer: Personal History of Artistic Development

My initial exposure to the world of art was by way of coloring books and painting images of Disney princesses in watercolor paint books. Coloring has always been relaxing for me and I always loved the positive reinforcement I received from my pictures. When I started school, I had my first negative experience with art. I discovered that making a flinging motion with a paint-covered paintbrush made really cool designs on the paper. I didn't realize I was spotting the classroom and my classmates with paint splatters. I was sent home from school early that day. I honestly don't think I revisited the paint center after that incident and my creative impulses were probably stifled for a long while after. Years later, a visiting artist came to my 7<sup>th</sup> grade art class. Each student got his or her own canvas board, which was the first time any of us had painted on a real canvas so we were all very excited. Ms. Stokes taught a Bob Ross-style painting lesson and as a class we painted a lighthouse scene step-by-step. This moment was influential because it was my first opportunity to create art with quality materials, like a real artist would use. It was a neat experience and a good way to learn a few new painting techniques.

My high school art teacher Mrs. Carnes also had a huge influence on my life as an artist. One lesson in particular that stands out in my mind was an oil pastel lesson on Georgia O'Keefe. One of the most influential things Mrs. Carnes did for me as my art teacher was encouraging me to put my work into shows. Mrs. Carnes pushed me to enter my work into the Georgia National Fair Art exhibit, where I earned 2nd place in 3D sculpture and Honorable Mention in 2D oil pastels. Mrs. Carnes also encouraged me to pursue a career in art, so my senior year of high school I attended a summer workshop at the Art Institute of Atlanta.

My understanding of, and appreciation for, art grew when I started taking art classes at

Gainesville College. As a member of the Gainesville College Art Club, I was also allowed the opportunity to go on a trip to New York City. We visited museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MOMA, the Guggenheim, and other small galleries sprinkled throughout the city. This was a huge moment in my life as an artist because I was exposed to so many different styles and art works that I had never seen before. While I was a student at Gainesville College I came across the opportunity to become involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Hall County, where I volunteer as a face painter. The kids are always fascinated by the art on their face and I like to think that it may influence them artistically in some way. I continued to grow as an artist when I transferred to North Georgia College and State University, where we were encouraged to delve deeper into the meaning behind our art. As an Art Education major at NGCSU, I was involved in a service-learning project for the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit "Key Ingredients". We implemented an educational learning center for visiting schools that incorporated art with nutrition. We made paper mache food sculptures and a large interactive kitchen center. The entire experience was incredibly time consuming and exhausting, but it was so awesome to be a part of a collaborative artist experience.

During my career as an art student I was able to explore many different mediums and processes. Unfortunately, because I was an art education major, I was encouraged to expose myself to as many mediums as possible and didn't really get to master any of them. Looking back, I feel I could have benefited more as an artist if I had majored in art and then later studied art education. I am grateful, however, that I was extended the opportunity to study so many different art forms and styles.

As a student at NGCSU I also had the opportunity to complete a portion of my student

teaching in England, which was very influential in my life as an artist and educator. The schools I observed incorporated visual art, music, and/or drama into just about every lesson. It was very inspiring to see the arts integrated in such a way as well as how it made the teaching more effective. While in Europe, I decided to spend my spring break in Italy. Visiting Italy was absolutely an amazing experience to have as an artist. I was able to see up close and first-hand the masterpieces that I had spent hours studying in art history classes.

Over this past year, I have learned so much in the Masters of Arts Education Program at the University of Florida. The program as a whole has allowed me to become an active member in an online/digital community. This in itself is extremely valuable to me as an aspiring educator and professional artist. The instructors and my fellow classmates have all shared and offered different perspectives, advice, stories, and knowledge that have allowed me to grow in my own beliefs and opinions and as an artist. While I have learned about so many important aspects of art education, there has been one aspect of art education learning that was very significant and influential to my way of thinking about art education. Visual culture and media messages are a very important topic to me as a young female and also as a mentor to young girls.

In several of the classes I have experienced I have been asked to consider how media messages and the visual culture that surrounds us daily may affect our thought processes and our art. My research was overwhelming and it disturbed me to realize how much visual culture is destroying our society- especially our youth. Young girls are forced to battle with contemporary issues such as low self-esteem, body dismorphia, eating disorders, sexism, and sexualization. Young boys are also affected when they are exposed to images of the “strong/masculine man” and messages of how he “should” look like or act. I also realized how much these contemporary

issues, personally, have affected me, as I have a 'perfectionist' personality that plays out in all aspects of my life.

Throughout this program we have been asked to consider artistic development theories and examine how they have changed throughout the years. As times and cultures have evolved, so have understandings about the nature of artistic learning. The current trending theory for considering artistic development is based upon socio-cultural perspectives. It is my belief, that with any historical matter, we must grow and evolve our theories and schools of thought, but we must not completely eradicate or forget theories of the past. Past theories have gotten us to where we are today. This is the same for artistic development theories. Each new theory has evolved from the previous theory. The recent technological revolution that has impacted and perpetuated globalization, has introduced new artistic learning/development theories based on socio-cultural perspectives.

I think as artists and as art educators we need to understand these past understandings as well as current understanding. For example, in the case of visual culture, past experiences with propaganda (dealing with race, war, government, etc.) have allowed us to experience the consequences of not understanding how these messages can impact our ideals, beliefs, and our society as a whole. Our society now is still being bombarded with visual culture images and messages, but on a much larger scale due to easy access and sheer influx in technology and media. Modern artists are also realizing the importance of working together and as a community to bring attention to social and cultural issues and concerns.

My art has always been very influenced by what I see and by what others were doing. I have always strived to create a 'pretty' result or a realistic image. I have always been terrified of

'mess' or 'chaos'. Everything in my art has always been planned and with great thought put into how others would react. My mother is very much like Martha Stewart and my stepmother is a pageant queen, so I have always felt a pressure to achieve perfection. Throughout the process of this program, I have learned more about development and branching outside of my comfort zone.

Over the summer during the UF summer studio intensives, I took Bob Mueller's printmaking course "A Sense of Place". Bob encouraged us to use our senses to create non-objective art that expressed our senses and our feelings. This was completely different from any other style of art I had previously attempted. For someone with a perfectionist personality, letting go of the control and process to non-objective art based on feeling is a huge challenge. Once I was able to truly let go and just create art, it was so freeing. I realized I didn't have to worry about a 'perfect' or realistic outcome and I was able to just create and be an artist.

The more I have considered visual culture and how much I have been influenced by society and media culture, I have realized that I do not have to be perfect. Understanding this has allowed me to venture out in my art and not worry so much about a controlled process or result. Non-objective art has become such a freeing outlet for me as an artist. The ideas and theories discussed throughout the course of this program will definitely have an impact on my ideas about art and learning as I continue to grow as an artist and when I am teaching art.

My biggest strategy as an artist right now is to continue learning and evolving as a person. When the artist evolves in their life, they evolve in their work.