

Interview with Jordan Blackburn on November 4th, 2020

The interview duration was 47min, below is a distilled and edited version for readability purposes

Martin: You sent me images of the audience participation mural titled “Artist for a Day” you did in Halifax, could you tell me more about this project?

Jordan: “Artist for a day” is in fact an event put on by NASCAD and that mural was a submission I made with a friend from printmaking. It’s a public event, not necessarily geared as marketing for prospective students, but more as a public engagement event. People from the public come and do accessible art things, which are often weird, like next to us was a fish printing workshop where there was fresh fish from the grocery store that people ink and press onto paper, super gross but the results are cool. The entire thing is about getting people to put their hands on these art making processes. For our mural we had pre-printed and cut out all the images and collaborated with the public in the pasting and creating a composition, essentially I was there to help little kids paste the wall.

Martin: What did you use for paste?

Jordan: We used Methyl Cellulose because it simple and I had experience with it’s limitations so I knew what consistency would be easy to clean-up but still not be too weak to hold. It was mix so that it could be easy to peel off afterwards, as that was a requirement of the inclusion into the event. Wheat paste for interior buildings like that does not work as mice like to eat the wheat pastes, so if it low down or on the floor it’s basically food for animals, Methyl Cellulose doesn’t have that issue.

Martin: The cutouts, where they screen printed before hand or were they digital images you printed?

Jordan: They were all multicolour screen prints on 22 x 30 inch sheets, we did a number of runs with each image in different colour schemes then cut them out. Which is really fast actually, this was the first time I did something like this with the public but I’ve done this process before and every time I have 6 to 10 times the material I need, it’s crazy how far the material goes. For this Mural we did around 40 sheets of images, when it was done we had leftover to do probably 4 more murals of that size. The other bonus of doing it this way is that the material cost next to nothing, even if we paid for the ink, which NASCAD donated in the end, that total cost would have been around \$40. Even the wallpaper project for the house, which was around 600 sq ft, about 90 sheets of wallpaper that whole project costs less than \$100, way cheaper than buying store bought wallpaper.

Martin: Speaking of that wallpaper project (Toile #1) what was the idea behind incorporating images of vagabonds and installing it in a private residence?

Jordan: One of the drawing is a French photograph from Paris during housement era when urbanization was taking off and the photograph is called “The rag picker” and it is

an image of a man pulling a cart full of rags. It made me think of a weird niche that still exists today but in a different way with mainly bottles. Back then people would find rags and sell the cloths that were wearable and sell the remaining or unwearable cloths to factories and business to use as rags for cleaning.

I had learnt about the “Joie de vivre” wallpaper and fabric design which was from a similar era to the rag pickers in Paris. The “Joie de Vivre” typically showed people having fun, relaxing, doing sports, showing middle class and high cultures enjoying themselves or landscapes in pastoral themes. So I decided to contrast these two things by showing downtrodden characters displayed on a luxuries presentation in a private space to bring out that “outside-In” idea.

Martin: How did you find a location to install this?

Jordan: I had been handbombing and guerrilla installing things around Halifax and the NASCAD campus, but for this project knowing there are lots of beautiful private homes around Nova Scotia I just made a post on facebook asking if anyone would be willing. Surprisingly, tonnes of people responded and it became a bit of a weird application process of people sending me photos of their spaces before I decided upon a house owned by friends of friend out in Dartmouth. It was one of the old “mail-order” Sears kit homes from the early 1900’s, the style was perfect for that wallpaper.

I had never wallpapered anything before so it was a big learning curve with both printing and installation, I had no idea what I was doing, just making mistakes, learning, and finally pulled it all together; which led to some crazy things after like winning the BMO 1st Art! award.

Martin: Having a public call to install wallpaper into a private home, especially wallpaper that is images of vagabond and downtrodden characters. People we see in public spaces who do not necessarily have private space to return to.

Jordan: Yes it was kind of a funny, I was worried I wouldn’t find any volunteers. This pretty wallpaper that you look closer at and it’s a bunch of homeless people.

Martin: For the past few years you’ve been living and working out of Trois-Rivieres, Quebec. You’re part of a printmakers collective out there right?

Jordan: Yea, I work out of Atelier Presse Papier here in Trois-Rivieres. It’s a printing house, gallery, studio, and workshop space. The gallery rotates exhibition every month, works from members of the collective as well as outside artists. I have a solo exhibition going up in February 2023. Once a year there is also a bigger themed group show by the collective. We also get involved with public art works around town, street festival, and art events. I’ve done a few pasted mural now as a result of being involved with and having connections through Presse Papier. We do the occasional screen printing demonstrations/workshops which is the classic downtown studio open house idea, where the public comes and learns about screen printing and show people the basics.

Martin: Is Atelier Presse Papier a publicly funded spot?

Jordan: I think it's mixed. However, I do not think it's considered a public building or public location. It's still a private studio for which we pay \$600 annual membership. For shows at the Gallery they do pay the artists based on CARFAC schedule, which is great, I'm going to get paid for the upcoming exhibition in February. There is also a visiting artist program, artist talks, and lots of the members are involved with universities around Quebec so there ends up being overlap there. It's a very flexible and fluid institution.

Martin: I can imagine as a printmaker is can be difficult to find a location and the required equipment to do that type of work.

Jordan: For that reason printmaking leans more towards communal spaces. Loads of studio in Trois-Rivieres have come and gone but Presse Papier has been around for almost three decades. I speculate they have outlived so many studios and artist collectives because of exactly that, it's way harder to close, pick up, and move elsewhere. There just so much heavy and specific equipment, at the end of the day it easier to buckle down and find a creative way to make the business side work than it is to close up or move. This also builds an inherently communal and collaborative energy as you have to share everything, not just space but tools. Imagine being in a painting studio where everyone has to share the same set of brushes.

Martin: Sounds like it forces a creative aspect in the "business" of how to pay rent and keep the lights on. So you have this exhibition coming up in February, what else do you have planned for next year?

Jordan: I'm hoping that show in February I can integrate some ideas I've had for previous shows but was unable to do because of Covid, get some more tech incorporated. I also have a exhibition around the same time at the Tom Thomson Gallery in Ontario, and later I'll send that work to a group exhibition that will be dispelled alongside some original Tom Thomson, group of seven, drawings and paintings. It's all about ways of interpreting nature, the evolution of interpretations of nature within the work, perceptions of ethnic and society views on nature. How media effects perceptions of nature.

As always, I'm writing grants and looking for funding. I want to incorporate an "Audio Spotlight" into some of these projects but they are expensive. So after this call I'll be finishing a funding application to hopefully buy one.

Martin: Thanks for taking the time to chat with me. Good luck with the funding application and with the upcoming exhibitions.