

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MATT DUFFIN '91



This UH CoAD Environmental Design graduate has turned his design talents into an art career and was recently featured in the NYTimes. You can see his work in Houston as it is currently on display at Koelsch Haus thru Nov 12th.

How did you shift from studying Architecture to a successful career as an artist?

I slowly began to wean myself from the dream of designing big, shiny buildings several years into my architecture studies at U of H. In my opinion, I wasn't nearly as organized or punctual as I would have needed to be to work as an architect. One of my professors accurately referred to me as "a day late and a dollar short". I was too idealistic, dreamy, and temperamental to work with others. My career as an artist has been a meandering path. Lots of ups and downs, long stretches of self-doubt, along with the occasional feather in my cap. This is not a career for the faint of heart. In my case, it was either work at the grocery store or pull a rabbit out of a hat....so I opted for the latter.

What part of your education do you feel best prepared you for your career?

My UH professors prepared me for life after college. There were a handful in particular that helped shape my artistic vision. Patrick Peters, Leslie Elkins, and Wilhelm Hahn were quite influential. Patrick and his astute proclivity towards simplicity, elegance and quality helped foster the same in my own work

Your work was recently featured in the NY Times, how did that come about?

The NY Times project came from left field. I'm a fine artist, which means that I produce work that ends up on the walls of galleries. However, because the narrative quality of my work lends itself to illustration, I haphazardly dabble in it. Every year I enter some noteworthy illustration competitions, occasionally get in, then rely on my inclusion in the annual as my means of exposure to that world. In the case of the NY Times job, they saw my work in American Illustration, which is based in New York.

What is your favorite memory of the College of Architecture and Design?

Well, aside from all the mischief I took part in.....I have fond memories of the late nights in the building that were a result of having put off the projects I was supposed to be working on. The late nights themselves weren't much more productive, but I really enjoyed the feeling of camaraderie with the other students who were in the same boat as me. One of my favorite memories is of the midnight breaks to the music building across the way. My friend, John Case, was a gifted pianist. He played entirely by ear, and most of what he played was improvised. I would lie underneath the grand piano in the dark while John would tap into a musical stream of consciousness of sorts.

Can you tell us about your upcoming show in Houston which runs until November 12th?

The upcoming show will be a balance of the darker, "earnest" pieces from the New York Times project and lighter, tongue and cheek works that have become my focal point as of late. The show is at Koelsch Haus Gallery and will run till Nov.12th.



*Images provided by Matt Duffin