

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST JASMINE PETERSEN '05

Jas, your journey as an artist is truly remarkable and your talent is evident in your prolific work. Can you share the story of how you became an artist?

Foremost, thank you for the kind words. I feel humbled and deeply appreciative. It's a lovely feeling to share my story with SJA. At the young age of 5, my parents



put me in an afterschool art program at Sabina's Studios which was located on Dempster a block away from where I grew up. Sabina was an incredibly lovely woman, who taught various materials and techniques. You would start her program with charcoal, and then move into pastel, then watercolor, followed by acrylic and oil paint. Learning that all images are composed of shapes (circles, triangles, and squares) was an essential part of her first lesson. We completed a series of still life artworks (fruit, wine bottles, small statues of figures or animals) in charcoal and pastel before moving on to working from

photographs in water-based paint. It was fascinating and I realized I simply enjoyed making art. That studio space became my safe space, and I looked forward to going as much as I could.

My parents and sisters are also artistic and big appreciators of art. Growing up, I would paint with my family often. I have fond memories of sitting at the ocean painting the beaches and waves off the coast of Denmark (where my father is from) with my sisters. We'd also go to ceramic studios where you paint on pottery and can pick up your finished project a week later, and we still make time for this activity today. These pieces, dating back more than twenty years, are scattered between our kitchens and homes, serving as reminders of times we all painted together. The encouragement from my family to pursue art is a big reason I ended up taking a chance on making art my career path.

I attended The Art Institute of Chicago for college and predominantly studied Architecture & Animation. At the time, I thought making Painting my

concentration for school was too risky, so I went with more technical studies. In my second half of college, I interned and worked for the Chicago based artist, Tyrue "Slang" Jones, an animator for many cartoon series we love such as Pinky & The Brain and Looney Tunes. It was an absolute treat and privilege to learn from him. Unfortunately, my apartment was broken into a month after graduating college, I lost all of my work, right before I applied as an entry level animator to Warner Brothers or Pixar. There was no evidence of my time at The Art Institute of Chicago. I was devastated and took some months to figure out my life plan. During this time, I got an artist studio space at Lacuna Lofts in Pilsen. An eclectic building filled with every kind of artist and creative. This was my dreamland. I worked as a bartender as I rebuilt my portfolio; despite losing all my SAIC work, I knew I had to pursue life as a creative.

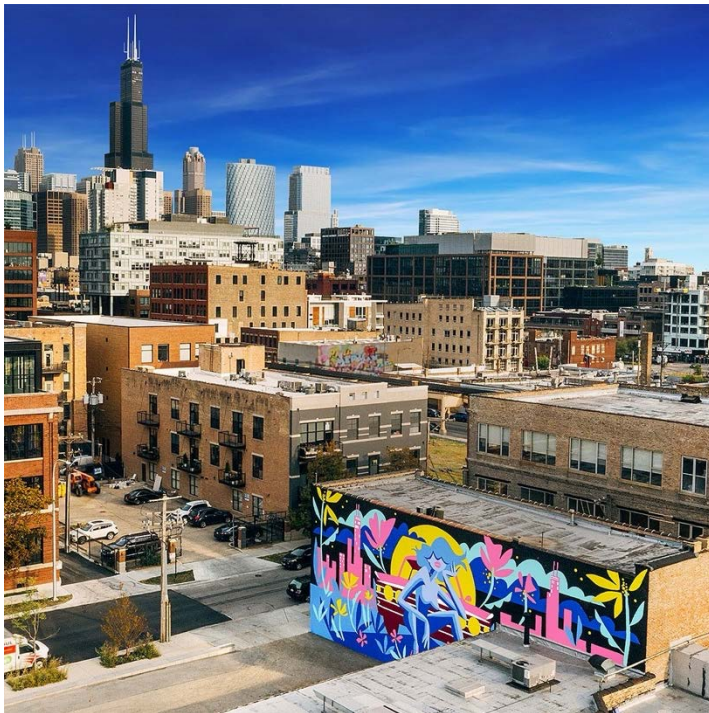
A friend of mine from Lacuna Lofts, Jason Eano, visited me one day while I was bartending. Over our conversation, I expressed my frustration and desperation to find a way to make art my career path, feeling hopeless that the robbery took that away from me. He worked in arts services for brands and asked me if I'd like to join a team working at Super Bowl XLIX in Phoenix in 2015. I jumped at the opportunity and tackled a handful of murals and activations for a large Bud Light activation. I even ended up live painting Shaq for a Bud Light commercial alongside my now long time friend and also painter, Mauricio Ramirez: It was a mind blowing and life altering experience. This was my big break into a series of jobs and partnerships with brands such as Stella Artois, Pabst Brewing Company, The Remix Project, Vans, Adidas, Nike, and Rebecca Minkoff to name a few. I worked and collaborated with artists I had admired for years, made many new lifelong friends, and traveled and painted all over the country with my fellow artist friends. It was an incredible time in my life. And all that segued into my professional practice I have today.



The concept of your “Fastgirl” character is captivating. Could you elaborate on how and why you came up with this unique concept and how you began painting her on buildings?

I painted my first “Fastgirl” character for a class assignment during my first semester of college in 2009. Although they weren’t named “Fastgirl” at the time, I drew and painted this character over and over again in the following years. Exploring the concept of women’s identity and empowerment was something I was always drawn to. I come from a family of strong women, so it later became important to show that energy in my art.

The title “Fastgirl” came from my graduating senior year piece at The Art Institute. I replicated a Danish Hot Dog stand, titling it “FastGirls”. A bubblegum colored food stand fully equipped, even with 20 vanity bulb lights wrapped around the top. The artwork was a commentary on society and consumerism, and



it got a lot of praise. I ended up naming my characters after this art piece. I was able to develop the “Fastgirl” character further and make the world in which she lives in. The “Fastgirl” character has gone through several adaptations and meanings as I grew up myself. The jobs I landed during this time gave me the opportunity to paint on buildings from people who appreciated my art. More opportunities came as I proved I could take on bigger walls.

Last October, you created a compelling Fastgirl billboard image for the McDonald’s on Ohio Street in Chicago, which also benefitted the Ronald McDonald House. How did this collaboration come about?

I was visiting my family in Copenhagen last summer when I received an email from H/L Agency asking if I had interest in creating the artwork for the Rock N Roll McDonalds downtown Chicago. We jumped on a zoom call shortly after and spoke about design, vision, goals for the mural. As excited as I was to be asked

to design the artwork for this iconic location, I was trapped between personally not typically eating McDonalds food but wanting the opportunity to have a mural in this part of the city. I brought up the idea of printing and framing the artwork for auction at the Ronald McDonald House Charity. As that component made the partnership meaningful for me.



Where else could a person find your murals – here in Chicago and elsewhere. I have murals in Chicago, New York, Miami, Greece, and Mexico. I've also had the honor of painting several walls in my parents' home countries of Denmark and Ecuador.

Reflecting on your time when attending SJA, what were some of the highlights of your time in grade school? Did any teacher influence you?

I really enjoyed art class and doing after school art activities with Mrs. Reiff. I think she saw something in me at a young age and she definitely nurtured that. I have a lot of appreciation for my school room teachers who also would rely on me for art advice and questions. That created a liking to art and a confidence I carry within me today.



For present day students at The Academy SJA, what advice would you offer based on your own experiences and journey as an artist?

My advice would be that a #2 pencil and a dream can take you anywhere in this world. Let your imagination grow wild, never stop being playful and curious, and the world will open its arms to you. The world needs more artists so keep creating.

Looking ahead, where do you envision yourself in the next 5 years?

I would love to showcase with an international gallery. And of course, more murals and art shows here in Chicago and around the world.



Learn more about Jas and her art

<https://www.jaspetersen.com/shop>

https://www.instagram.com/jas_petersen/