

4-25-2015

Interview with Andrew Abbott

Andrew Abbott

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Recommended Citation

Catherine Fisher, "Interview with Andrew Abbott" (2015). *Makers@PPL: Stories in the Making audio interviews*. 4.
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Interviewer: Catherine Fisher
Interviewee: Andrew Abbott
Makers@PPL, Portland, Maine
4.25.2015

CF: We're here at the Portland Public Library for Makers@PPL. It's a makers fair. It's the 25th of April, year 2015. This is Catherine Fisher and I'm here with Andrew Abbott of Portland. So Andrew, you are a painter. I was hoping you could talk to me a little bit about what you paint, and we'll get into all kinds of other questions.

AA: Well, I paint all kinds of strange things. One thing I just painted is a big potato with four legs. I also paint ... I don't know, whatever! All kinds of weird stuff. You should look at my website and see.

CF: Why don't you give your website?

AA: It's allabbott.com. That's confusing. Sorry.

CF: How would you characterize your work for somebody who has never seen it before?

AA: I would say it's pretty strange. It's got a lot of detail. You can tell what I'm painting, but it's not ... like if I paint a potato, you might be able to tell it's a potato, but it's not like any potato you've ever seen. Maybe, actually, there are other people that paint similar potatoes. There's lots of artists like me. I don't know. Maybe not. We're all unique, but the same. Maybe. I don't know.

CF: Would you say they're fantastical? Or surrealistic? Or what kind of words would you ...

AA: In some ways fantastical. Maybe they're my fantasy. The things, I don't know where they come from. They just appear on the page. It's pretty weird. I'm kind of exploring the universe myself as I'm creating it. I don't know. But now I like to have an idea. I like to do commissions. I like to do everything. I like to do art. Anything. Anything goes.

CF: Do you do it every day?

AA: Oh yeah, definitely. I'm an artist 24 hours a day. Whatever I'm doing. Even if I'm driving a car, I'm an artist. Or mopping a floor. Whatever.

CF: How did it start? How did Andrew become an artist?

AA: Well, I went to college, and I didn't know what to major in, and my mom said, "You should be an art major." And I was like, "OK." Here I am, 47 years later. Wait. I don't know, not that many years, but something like that. I'm 36. I have red hair. I'm wearing an orange coat.

CF: So you went to college and you were an art major and then you also went into the military, right?

AA: I did. I don't know what got into my head, but I joined the army. I'm a pacifist. I don't like violence. I told them I didn't want to be involved in any killing, so I was a medic and learned how to save lives and stuff, which hopefully I still know how to do. But I'm not certified. But if somebody gets blown up, I know what to do. And other emergencies, too. Anyway, that's not my job anymore. Thank god.

CF: Did you make art while you were in the military?

AA: Oh yeah. I painted lots of small pictures on paper because I had to be more portable and I didn't have as much space. I could carry a whole bunch of paintings if they were small ones and on paper. That's why I did small paintings on paper for so long. And I still do ones like that. But I do bigger stuff now.

CF: And you get to show your work.

AA: Yes, I am in lots of art shows. Here in Portland, I am in a show next month called Yellow. You can find out on my website. Andrew Abbott. You know, that's my name. Andrew Abbott. You can look me up. I'm on Facebook. I've got a big show in Des Moines, Iowa, which is pretty exciting, and that's a really big show. I did lots of new, big paintings for that, canvasses. That's next month. It's cool.

CF: How did that come about?

AA: I built up my Facebook page and used it to market myself, and they found me through Facebook. They just noticed my work on there and contacted me. They've been representing me for a few years now in Des Moines and Chicago. So if you're in Des Moines or Chicago or Louisville or Cologne, Germany or Portland, Maine, you can go see my work.

CF: How about Spain?

AA: Spain? There's some paintings there, but they're just in private collections.

CF: And I asked that because you lived in Spain.

AA: Catherine Fisher's got a good private collection.

CF: Yes, she does.

AA: She's got some of my great paintings.

CF: You're getting a lot of exposure, then, all over the country.

AA: Not as much as I would like.

CF: How important is that? Exposure, to you?

AA: I think it's really important. I want everyone to see my paintings. That's why I do it. I feel like I'm an entertainer. I want to paint pictures for entertainment. I want people to look at them and be entertained. There's deeper meaning if you want it. Or it's just a pretty picture. But whatever it is, I just want them to be something ... you know, that's what they're for. I painted them so people could look at them. In today's world, using the internet ... I mean, my stuff is seen all over the world. I can put something online and it's seen by thousands of people all over the world. And that's amazing. Changing, weird world for an artist, I think. Great time to be alive.

CF: That's great. I don't mean to keep you forever.

AA: Keep me forever. Yup. It's good. I'll talk.

CF: If you want to just say something about that deeper meaning bit. I wonder if, in some ways, the way you title your pieces hints at that. I know, also, sometimes, you include text in your paintings, either handwritten or things torn from other sources.

AA: I don't have any big, large broad term of describing my work, but each ... There's a lot of topics I cover. Sometimes, it's in the moment. I notice something about the painting or something in the news or something, and that will come out in the work. But I also try to make them pretty ambiguous at the same time, so that they can mean more than one thing, the image itself and the words. I try to make it so it's kind of ambiguous. Each person is going to see something different or interpret something different. I think I'm doing that sometimes. I don't know.

CF: How important is it, where you are painting? Does where you're doing it impact what you make, do you think, at all?

AA: I always work where I live. I've never even really wanted to have a studio space separate from where I lived. So I can be working throughout the day, whenever, and looking at everything on my walls and stuff. As far as location, sometimes I've had a choice where to live and sometimes not. I feel like everywhere is pretty amazing. Every city I've lived in is pretty beautiful and amazing and inspiring. Portland, Maine, is the best, though.

CF: Portland, Maine's the best.

AA: Portland, Maine, is my home, for sure. This is where I'll always come back. And the Portland Public Library. Thank you, Catherine Fisher.

CF: Is there anything else you want to say?

AA: Just thank you. Find me on Facebook. Andrew Abbott, that's my name.

CF: Thank you so much.