

Tuesday July 10<sup>th</sup> 2007

## **Rootist Art**

### The Manifesto

I need you to believe in me. I will not deceive you and I will not hurt you. For the short duration it takes to read these pages, I need you to put your faith in me. When you are finished reading this, if you do not want to continue to believe in me then you can walk away, and life will return, and neither of us will have lost anything. I come to you bearing a message; a message that is not just something I believe in, but it is something I have lived and it is now a part of me.

I was seventeen years old and I had lost my aunt; she had died tragically and without warning. I could not come to terms with the immense loss and sadness that I was feeling. I felt alone. My life was filled with people who loved me and wanted to support me and still I felt disconnected and without hope. I was in my high school art class and I had just finished a preliminary drawing for a project about losing my aunt. I took the drawing to my teacher and he said, "This could be really special." That was it; five very simple words about a very simple drawing that would change my life forever.

It was not the words that changed me; hidden somewhere behind those words there was a very real feeling that this man really knew what I was saying. Suddenly, I knew I was not alone. In that moment I felt a connection not just with my teacher, but with all people. I felt the struggles and triumphs we all share as humans; that somewhere inside all of us we seek to feel and share these indescribable emotions so that we may better understand ourselves and our world. I had accomplished this momentous feat by creating a simple piece of art that I believed in without reservations.

I knew at that moment I wanted to be an artist; that I wanted to dedicate my life to creating art so that no one in this world would feel alone. I was still a child though, and I knew I had to go out into the world and learn what it meant to be an artist. For the next year and a half I worked, with this new understanding of art, towards being accepted into the best art school possible.

I spent two years at this school, learning the things I thought I needed to become a great artist. I learned how to speak a critical language of art that used concepts like space, movement, texture, color, light, and perspective in order to dissect and better understand art. I learned that I needed to understand the concepts and ideas of all the great artists before me so I could use those to develop my own unique and progressive ideas. But of all the things I learned, nothing connected with me the same as the experience I had with that simple drawing and my teacher. It was then I learned my final lesson at art school; I was not going to find what I was looking for here. So I left.

I ventured into the adult world; still desperately searching for the answers that would help me become a great artist and recapture that feeling of connecting with the world. For six years I struggled to find the answer within myself and my work. I pushed the limitations of my intellect and conceptual understanding of art; I began reading books on the human mind and how it worked with the hope that the answer could be found in the writings of some therapist or philosopher.

With each new work I created I felt increasingly like a failure because I could not recreate that feeling of connecting to the world. I needed to understand; I needed an

answer and I was determined if I thought enough about it I would find one, somewhere in the depths of my brain. I began to push people away, people that I loved, in order to focus on myself. My thoughts consumed me, my artwork made me furious and a failure, I felt like I was losing control.

I thought I was becoming one of those crazy, drunken, tortured artists that our culture wrongly glorifies and embraces. All of a sudden, I felt alone. I still had a life full of people who loved me and wanted to support me, and yet here I was again, disconnected and without hope. I woke up one day and began watching a documentary on a very brilliant, and unfortunately, very disturbed musician. As I watched I found myself crying and becoming increasingly more anxious. I began to panic; I turned off the documentary and tried to regain my senses. I couldn't. I thought I was losing my mind, and I was totally aware and helpless.

Out of desperation I called my brother and told him I thought I was going crazy; he assured me I wasn't and he talked to me and calmed me down. As I walked to work that evening I made a decision. I was a drunk, I hated my job, my art had lost its purpose, I had lost the girl I love, and I had become too afraid to feel my own emotions. This is not the person I wanted to be and I was determined to change.

Over the next few months I dedicated myself to not being afraid anymore. I had to let go of my need to understand and control my life; I had to face the demons that haunted me and the fears I was so frantically running from. I found the courage to do it, and it was miserable. One day I was sitting by the Hudson River and without any warning things changed. I felt like I had entered another dimension. The pressure and anxiety were gone and I could feel again.

The days that followed brought a renewal of almost everything I had lost in my life back to me. I rediscovered value in my life and the life of others. I remembered why I wanted to be an artist and what that felt like. The feeling of that moment with the simple drawing and my teacher returned, and I realized what I was missing all these years; you! I needed people to complete that puzzle I had been trying to solve all these years. It was only then I understood my own art.

*I* am a Rootist artist, it is my job to believe in my work and be completely honest while creating it. I must relinquish myself to the artwork, and surrender my preconceived notions about how to make something beautiful or inspiring and simply trust that if I am honest with every decision I make in the creation process, that I will be left with a piece of art that truly speaks. I must let go of the critical language of art filled with concepts and ideas used to try and understand it. I must believe that art serves a real and powerful purpose in my life; that art is unique form of communication used between people to help them feel connected to one another in ways that they can feel but not verbalize.

*You* are a Rootist viewer. You must believe that when you stand in front of a piece of art you will be courageous enough to let go of trying to understand it and allow yourself to feel it. You must believe that this work contains something real and powerful and if you stand there and be open to being affected then you will feel a connection; not just with the artist, but with all people!

*We* are Rootist Art. We must believe that the artist and viewer both play equal and crucial roles in art. We must know that we need art as people, not to understand it, but to embrace that it is bigger than all of us; that art is an innate tool within each of us which gives us a way to communicate feelings and emotions we have no other way to

share with each other. We must embrace the fact that we need art, but more importantly we must embrace the fact we need each other!

If you no longer wish to believe in me then now is the time to walk away; I have done all I can to make you believe. However, if you do believe, and you know you are brave to walk this path with me, then let us rejoice! For we will live the power of art! We will walk through the streets shouting, "Believe in this my friends and do not fear failure, for it shall not find us!"

-Justin Rivenbark