

Have you always felt that you were an artist or do you remember a moment in your life when you realized it was something that you had to pursue?

From an early age I was probably spending more time drawing, painting and making things with my hands than studying. Of those subjects I did study, I loved history, art and geography, all of which supported my imagination and an unstoppable tendency to dream.

When, for my parent's sake, I tried to decide what I was going to do in life, I was overwhelmed by all the possibilities.

This, I think, is the first unfortunate sign of a creative mind.

For the next 30 years or so I lived as freely as possible, whilst allowing for to need to make a living, until, at the age of 50 (ten years ago), I woke up one morning and decided that no amount of money or worldly comforts should keep me from being creative on my own account rather than just on behalf of other people.

I sold my business and my house to finance my move into art.

Do you have any powerful memories that affected your work growing up in Italy?

Where do I start?

Claustrophobia was an overwhelming sensation until I was seventeen and decided to leave home and my loving parents.

I grew up in a confined space in Milan that we shared with my grandparents; my grandfather, God bless him, was very dictatorial and things could become strained.

By the time I was nineteen I had already been married for three months to the wrong woman (and vice versa), we'd got a child and got divorced. I was wearing a suit to work every day and life was grim.

During this period I had a near fatal car crash.

I suffered terrible injuries and I never stopped being grateful for being alive.

It was during this recovery period that I had time to reflect on how unhappy I was about the way I was living my life and decided to drop everything to go more "unconventional".

This is when I really started having the experiences that would eventually have such a bearing on my work.

Can you tell me about what you did prior to working full time as an artist?

At the age of nineteen I started a relationship with an African American woman thirteen years my senior, we lived together for four years.

We immediately decided to move to Rome, as it was a more artsy laid back environment and I wanted to work in the movies or maybe as an artist.

It wasn't long before I became an actor and I was cast as the driver in a movie called "The Driver's Seat" starring Elisabeth Taylor and Andy Warhol, who had a part as an enigmatic English Lord.

Life in Rome at that time, late sixties early seventies, was surreal; a lot of decadence.

It was here, living with my girlfriend who was quite well known, that I had my first taste of human rights movements and the great privilege to meet and, at times, hang out with figures such as Mohammed Ali and Wilt Chamberlain, along with a string of musicians and actors, all of whom would be in touch with my girlfriend when they came to Italy. Shaft and Superfly, with their iconic soundtracks, were the first movies made by African Americans.

This was all heady stuff, seen through the eyes of such a young man. I had to grow up quickly and make up for my lack of experience.

During this period I remember a lot of political unrest. It was as if the world was divided into extreme right and extreme left, with not much in the middle except for violence and hippies. Eventually I realized that being an actor wasn't quite being in charge and I started a production company with a couple of friends. One was a bright young politician, whilst the other was an experienced producer. As things turned out, the former was killed and the latter ended up in prison. Things really started to deteriorate when the then Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, was

kidnapped, like a lot of people, and killed. I had had enough and moved to London, with my new wife, with every intention of moving on to Los Angeles. Unfortunately I got divorced and lost momentum, so I never moved to The States, a place I'd always loved.

London was a great place in the seventies, and I was impressed with the Brits. The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Elton John, Rod Stewart, David Bowie, pink E types, the best motorcycles and the milk man, really cool.

From here, all my attempts to become an artist were hampered by the need to make a living. It was my artistic ability, though, that saved me.

I did everything I could lay my hands on, working for friends to begin with: I painted, decorated, restored antiques, worked with wood and metal, designed and built houses, designed a motorcycle and a car which, by invitation, was exhibited at the London Motor show in their "one off cars" stand. Eventually I ended up with a team of highly skilled craftsmen, most of whom I trained myself, and we started to work worldwide along side noted architects.

What made you decide to change careers so suddenly?

It wasn't sudden, in my life I had many loves but none of them seemed to last, but Art was different, and in the end I just had to dive in.

Have you always worked with resin? How did you come to discover this material?

We all are as different as our fingerprints.

One could say that STYLE is the way different individuals perform the same task in different ways.

Resin is the medium I use most often; you could say it is my style of the moment.

I started to use resin initially because it was the perfect medium with which to make the Jelly Babies that I made for my body of work on Cloning. This wasn't such a straightforward process as, when I started, there was nobody out there that I could use to help me. Every time I sought help from specialists I was told that I was already pushing up against the limits of what the material could be expected to do, so I was rather left to go it alone.

It took me some time and a lot of dedication, but I can confidently say that I have pioneered the use of this material.

I love its translucence and light reflective qualities; the effects are both happy and moody at the same time.

I also love the medium I use because this particular resin is unexploited and therefore has the immediate benefit of making my work instantly recognizable. Finally, my medium is technically very challenging; infuriatingly so sometimes, but in an odd way this spurs me on. Creativity has an odd relationship with frustration that, I suppose, is why people talk about suffering for their art.

Can you describe your actual artistic process for me?

Most of the times it goes like this: I make an original sculpture using clay or high density foam then I take a mould and cast a fiberglass or plastic master which I finish to a very high standard. Next I take a proper mould of the finished master, this is a particularly delicate process. The materials used, along with the construction methods, are my "trade secrets". I am now able to cast the resin into the mould under a strict methodology, but one that can adapt depending on the piece; the chef's hand is very important here.

After a period of curing in a controlled environment what comes out is not the beautifully finished item you see in the gallery. Now the piece undergoes a treatment very similar to that used in making a marble sculpture: we chisel, we scrape, we rub through many different grades of abrasives and then we polish. Unfortunately the costs involved are astonishing.

Are there any artists that preceded you and had an influence on your work?

I don't really follow what other artists are doing, but artists often respond to the same vibes in the air.

I really am not aware of one artist in particular that influenced me.

How did the "Jelly Baby" come to be incorporated into your work? What does it represent in your art?

Around 2000-2001 there was a lot of news about new developments in the ability to clone, I became very interested about the dilemma this resented us; between cloning, religious believes and medical ethics.

I chose the pop image of the Jelly Baby to represent cloned humans and used it on a whole body of work.

Have you always considered yourself a politically conscious person?

Politics are responsible for changing the world we live in, with massive repercussions, as we have seen many times. I find it fascinating how politicians, who are supposedly appointed to manage the interests of people, get there to begin with through intrigues and hypocrisy.

Sometimes they go on to do an admirable job, but often they don't. The rhythm of politics is perennial and reduces to the banal observation that a good politician is a popular one.

We should all try a bit harder with each other.

With the rise of the media and technology, Politics is becoming very intrusive in our everyday lives: Big Brother might well be around the corner.

It may seem, from the cultural criticism in your work, that you have a somewhat negative view of the society that we live in. Do you feel hopeful about the direction that younger generations are headed?

Where has the word respect gone? But then were has the word education gone as well, not necessarily the type you get at school, that's another problem. So, do we blame the youngsters or the parents?

I think young people should keep their eyes open and constantly extend their understanding of how others see things. This is the basis of moral behavior, and there is a twist to it, if you hone this understanding it can be a formidable best tool. When you have good morals you really can push the boundaries; people are much more tolerant of your eccentricities and feel less threatened by your views.

What hopes do you have for your work as an artist in the future?

I hope to have a long life in good health; I feel very fortunate that I'm doing what I am, and I have so much more I want to do than I physically have time for.

My hope is to get into museums and important collections, as that would really open the doors to more challenging projects, but that is more in the hands of the gallery that represents you.

So far I have had a fantastic response but, since patience is not one of my virtues, I feel that not enough people have seen my art outside the UK; a good gallery in the States would be great exposure.

Anyway, in the meantime, I am working like mad on my next show that will take place in London in October 2010.

I am lucky that my gallery in London can accommodate a new show for me every year, instead of the more customary two year gap. This suits my pace better...

Please include anything else that you feel I should know. Your journey into the world of art is amazing and the change you made in your career in order to pursue what you truly love is inspirational. There are many people in the world that have this passion in their hearts but keep it hidden. Thank you for your time. Please leave me a phone number that is convenient to reach you at. I will talk to you soon.

thomasrnicholas@gmail.com

www.thepearlykings.com