

Personal Art Education History
Bryan L. Hill
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I don't come from a line of artists; I'm not sure from where I got this gift. For the longest time I wasn't sure what I had was even a gift, I just knew that I could do things that others couldn't. I don't remember my first drawing, but I do remember my first sculpture it was of a turtle. Third grade Ms. Hodge's class, everyone else just made balls of clay but I recall thinking what is it that I can do with this clay. My mother smoked, so I said let's put a lip on it so she could hold her cigarette. Hopefully she'd appreciate this as all the other work I'd brought home in the past became either a place mat or a crumpled up basketball for my brother and his friends. She used it, and she still has it to this day although she no longer smokes, it sits on the coffee table in the living room where it was to be put on display, it didn't belong in the trash.

I continued to get As on my art work but it was too far and in between did anyone ever tell me that it was good, or asked what I was trying to say. No one ever questioned my intent. But that was okay, I kept my own work, I critiqued it myself. No one ever taught me how to mat and frame things so I taught myself how to mat and frame artwork. I would go to yard sales and take the old paintings out of the frames insert my own and transform my bedroom into a museum. [In hearing about the woman who just found a Renoir that she got from an odds and ends rummage sale, I hope I didn't throw away a master piece. It makes we wonder and investigate and inquire about nearly every piece of art that I come in contact with

I wasn't until my senior year in high school that going to art school ever entered into the conversation. I was taking a Commercial Graphics class and we were working on a 3-Dimesional cube focusing on value scale. We were on day three of the project and the teacher, Ms. Patterson noticed that I had not really made any real progress, I said but look at everyone else's work; I spent most of my time giving ideas and suggestions to my classmates, that I didn't even bother to work on my own. I have to credit Ms. Patterson as she said with my wealth of talent and desire to help others the art community could really use teachers such as myself. So during the winter break of my senior year, I worked on the portfolio to enter Virginia Commonwealth University.

It was at VCU, that my artwork began to be noticed not just by my peers but other artist. So much so that I didn't immediately enroll in the art education track but I started to take painting class, I was going to be a famous artist, or so I thought. It was Dean Murray DePillars in my first year that directed me to the art education department in his words, the field needs more people like you. I wasn't sure if he meant artist or black male teachers in art. He became my mentor, advisor and friend. In year 6 at VCU the day before graduation, I asked what he meant by the field needed more people like me, he said, "the field needs good artists to be teachers and the fact that you are black is an added bonus."

While in art school I wrote, "Art in the school curricula gives the student a vehicle to make a self-expression that is both creative and constructive. In creating a complete utopia, close the dictionary and open the child's mind; because their description of an utopian experience is much greater than any written word could ever allow." After a short stint with the Virginia Department of Transportation as a graphic artist and working for several other print shops in and around Richmond I took my talents to the Nation's Capital to begin another chapter of my artistic career.

I'm now in my 15th year of teaching at the same elementary school [Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School] in Washington, DC where our reading competence is nowhere near the proficiency level. In fact our reading scores are some one of the lowest in the city; but I'm producing some of the best illustrators of graphic novelist in the city. It goes to show that a student's creative energy cannot be limited to letters and words. Sentences and paragraphs do not always give the freedom for my students to express themselves. My students' willingness to learn is my driving force that makes me love what I do and keeps me where I am. Since I wasn't afforded the opportunity to have my artwork as a child displayed at home or anywhere for that matter, each year I have a school-wide art show where each and very student has one piece of art work on display. It is my mission that all students gain self-awareness and confidence in their work. That art show generates more guests to the building than I can ever remember. The opening reception is always standing room only.

Having my accomplishments and the successes of my students acknowledged has always been a thrill of mine. This past November I was a finalist for the Mayor's Art

Award in teaching for the District of Columbia it is most prestigious honors conferred by the city on teachers, not just art teachers.