

Final Goodbyes an Anno Domini interview with Mike Egan

Tell us a bit about your background.

I guess I was your typical suburban kid of the 1980’s growing up in the outskirts of Pittsburgh. I started drawing at a very young age, mostly cartoon characters and skateboard graphics. I started incorporating blood and knives into my images from a young age (this worried my parents a bit.) I always did well in my art classes, and decided to go to college. I attended Edinboro University of PA to study fine arts. I ended up focusing on printmaking, which is where I discovered many of the artists that I love today: Kollwitz, Beckman and Posada. After college I didn’t have access to the printmaking tools so I taught myself to paint.

How did your job as an embalmer in a funeral home come about?

After college I worked random jobs and continued to paint when I could. After a couple of years I decided that I needed a solid job, so I looked into going to mortuary school. I attended The Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science which was a year, followed by a one year internship. I moved out to Reading, PA to work as a full-time embalmer in 2005. There I did removals, embalming, cosmetics and dressing/casketing. I really loved the work, I just didn’t like the on-call hours.

That experience seems to have given you a perspective that now carries over into your work. What’s the narrative you’re thinking when creating your paintings?

Well I did get to use some of my skills as an artist in the embalming room. Every so often I had to do some restorative work on folks who had cuts, holes, or lacerations on their faces, neck, or hands. I also did the cosmetics to cover up bruises and discolorations. I’ve always been interested in themes of death in my art, however I think that my time spent in funeral homes has greatly influenced my work.

When creating my paintings I like to think about how people die, their funerals and what happens to them afterwards. I also think about the people left behind, funeral directors and the clergymen who perform the services. My paintings are kind of a *final goodbye* to those who have moved on.

You portray an honesty and humor about what really happens in “the end.” How does that affect your day to day living?

Man, when I worked in funeral homes I thought about death all the time, it was hard to escape it. I worked for a funeral home that did 500 calls a year, that’s a lot of death. Since I’ve made the transition to an artist, I really don’t think about death too much. I’m so busy living, being an artist, doing what I love to do. I paint the subject matter simply because it’s what I like to look at (skeletons, devils, coffins) or it’s an idea that makes me laugh.

Do you see yourself continuing with this narrative in your work?

I definitely feel like I’ve found my style, and I love painting my subject matter. I don’t know if I’ll be doing the same thing forever, I’m constantly trying to push myself to do different things with my work. The subject matter of life and death I think will always be there, it just may not be as in your face as it is now. Stylistically, I’ve been looking at a lot of patterns and typography which is starting to make its way into my paintings. I think in the future there will be changes—I don’t know what they will be or how drastic they will be, but I’m very excited about it.



The Devil Wears His Prayer Clothes  
acrylic on wood, 15”x15”, 2010



Our Local Funeral Home  
acrylic on wood, 14”x 9.75”, 2010



Truth Seeker  
acrylic on wood, 15”x15”, 2010



Funerals new works by Mike Egan

In his newest body of work, Pittsburgh, PA artist Mike Egan looks back on his time spent working in funeral homes. Surrounded by death and mourning, Mike started painting not only the stories of those who have passed, but the stories of those left behind after one’s passing; the mourners, the lovers, the hurt and the relieved. *Funerals* shows death in a tongue-in-cheek perspective of the ones who have passed, the ones who survived, and the people who deal with death day to day—the clergy. Devils and crosses, Clergymen spitting blood, and skeletons smoking pipes; *Funerals* shows satire in death and the rituals of saying goodbye.

Egan grew up in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As a kid, he drew cartoons, skateboard graphics, and had

found an interest in skeletons and devils. Through high school he continued to draw and decided to study art after graduation. Mike received a bachelor of fine arts from Edinboro University where he focused on printmaking. After college, not having access to printmaking tools, Egan taught himself to paint. A few years later he attended Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science and successfully became an embalmer/funeral director. Continuing to paint, Mike developed a style that incorporated his surroundings as well as his other influences: Folk art, Day of the Dead, horror movies, religion, Halloween, German Expressionism, and his time spent in funeral homes. Since 2006, Mike has shown his work in galleries throughout North America and the UK.

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Funerals new works by Mike Egan

Solo Exhibition March 4 - April 16, 2011  
Artist’s Reception Friday, March 4th 7pm-11pm





Looking Out For Each Other  
acrylic on wood, 24" x 24", 2010

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366 South First Street, San Jose, CA 95113 [www.galleryAD.com](http://www.galleryAD.com) 408.271.5155  
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