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**A Conversation with
Brent Hayden**
Arc Studio #205
By Sherri Cornett



Cosmic playground, distorted reality, metaphysical worlds, energy . . . these are the words that pulled me further into Brent Hayden's website and, once I saw his large scale 2- and 3-D collages (one wall piece is 8 x 6 feet!), I wondered about how they wove together with his life.

Sherri Cornett: Brent, your work is intriguing! I see spontaneity, disorder and randomness. Am I on target with your intentions?

Brent Hayden: Most of my work has a playful sense of curiosity with sometimes darker undertones hidden throughout. Your eye might be enjoying a cosmic trail of wonder, then suddenly take a turn towards something more grotesque in nature, as if it is lurking behind a building. Living in a metropolis such as SF has had a direct impact, sometimes it can seem like the most beautiful place full of endless paths, and other times it can be so sad just seeing things that can be done yet feeling helpless.

SC: Do you find some of your collage elements in the city?

BH: I've always been a creative hoarder. Finding something on the street, in thrift stores, SCRAP & Builders Resource. It's not always incorporated in my work, but the more components and materials I have surrounding me, the more I can bring ideas to life . . . often, right as the lightbulb goes off.

SC: What about the other elements?

BH: I tend to make large "batches" of a certain method (cyanotypes, photo transfers, Shrinky Dinks, illustrations etc.) or objects, and incorporate that with other work/pieces I've made. For example, I'll decide I need clouds for a piece and I'll cut out thousands of them. I will wake up with clouds on me, falling off in the shower, dropping in the street. I once found one of my compulsively created pieces in the Tenderloin months after I had made it!

SC: Shrinky Dinks?

BH: Yes! Making them is unpredictable, which is part of the excitement! I mold them right when they get out of the oven. I've brought this technique into my jewelry and incorporated the elements into my smaller pieces.

SC: Would you tell me more about how life enters your work?

BH: To be honest, when I was younger, I would get a little wild in the city. I was really into [Chuck Palahniuk and the Cacophony Society](#), all the stories of causing mayhem and I would just get the absolute worst ideas like skateboarding in a 5-star hotel at 4 a.m. Needless to say I ended up doing a few overnight stays in jail, but nothing major. I enjoy making scenes of chaos in a city-like environment, full of obscure people and other-worldly creatures.

At thirty-two, I've calmed down with my antics, but, every now and then I'll get another terrible idea that might somehow find its way into a piece! I want to thank my late grandfather who saw the path I was heading down and decided to help me with an education in something I am very passionate about, something I believe everyone deserves . . . minus the debt.

SC: Has Covid influenced where you are going with your work?

BH: Before Covid, I was in a constant flow of teaching in Castro, bartending in North Beach, living in Richmond and making art every possible moment at home. Then everything stopped. I have been trying to push all of my emotions and despair into my art.

I am hoping that my work can take the viewer away from reality for just a moment and let the eyes go on a rollercoaster ride away from 2020. I've been into making more interactive pieces, something a viewer can get lost into and walk away with a smile or a slight giggle. I really just try to have fun making work and not take myself too seriously.

SC: How do you get into this lighter mood? How are you inspired?

BH: The rhythms in the music of Nujabes, Devendra Banhart, Stan Getz, Bill Evans or Miles Davis start putting things in motion. And then there are the simple things like one-on-one conversations, collecting wacky plants, Victorian architecture, walking through the city, aimlessly, observing people and interactions.

Living with other artists before has helped me as well. Taking a step back and looking through the eyes of somebody else making work. There are master artists like Raschenberg, Can Guio-Qiang, Tanguy, Ray, Krasner and Kandinsky and local ones like Muzae, Milo Moyer-Battick, Ari Bird, Madeleine Tonzie, Joshua Nissen King, John Levy Warren, Jenna Williams, Nick Archilla, and Derek Lynch and Dianne Hoffman.

SC: And now, as the newest artist at Arc Studios, you will have more interaction with Dianne, who also has a studio there!

BH: Yes! I'm very excited. I've been wanting to be a part of that community for a while now and am always blown away by the work they show. Arc Gallery and Studios is truly a great staple in San Francisco.

Chuck Palahniuk and the Cacophony Society: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacophony_Society
Brent Hayden website: <https://www.brentdavidhayden.com/>

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