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JONATHAN FREEMANTLE lights your spark

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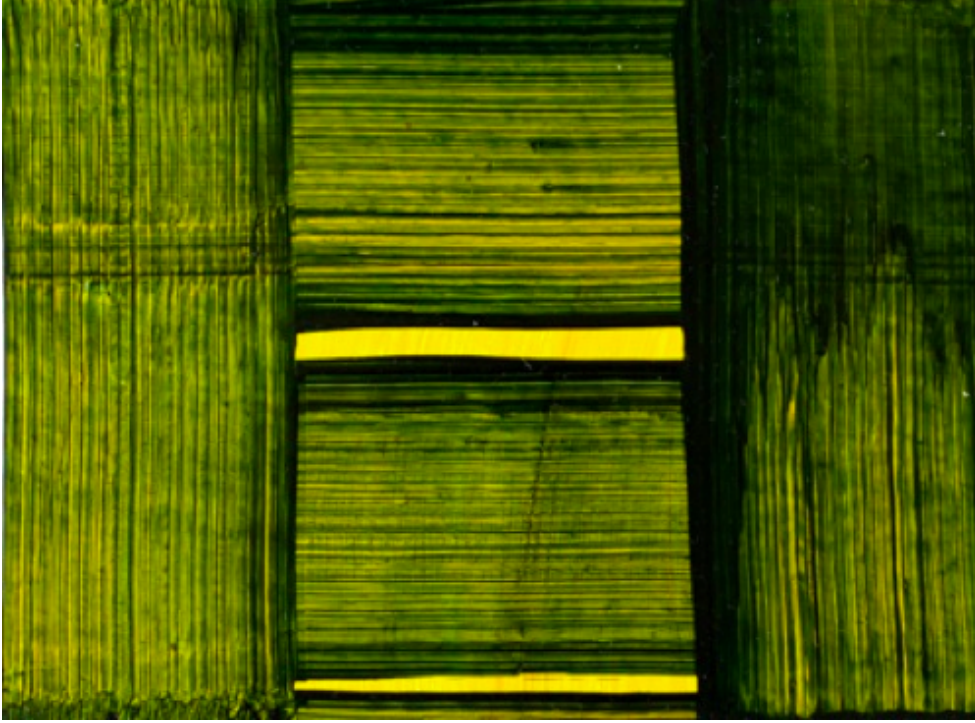
Photo of Jonathan Freemantle by Gabriela Silveira

JONATHAN FREEMANTLE is an artist and intellectual, but elegant networker and all around nice guy also spring immediately to mind. A slew of inventive projects keep this creative trailblazer busy. Widely acclaimed for his art, which has been featured in a host of international exhibitions, Jonathan is also the Art & Design Editor for the hip South Africa based [JRNL](#), and is the co-founder of the Edinburgh Fashion Festival, which will kick-off

its inaugural edition later this year. Jonathan, formerly based in Cape Town has now left his African home for the up-and-coming arts scene of Edinburgh.

To view more of Jonathan's art and learn more about the philosophy behind his fascinating *Divina Proportione* series please click: [here](#).

Interview by [Daniel Scheffler](#)



© Jonathan Freemantle

SO, HOW DID YOU COME TO ART?

My father is an artist so I guess it was in my genes. I remember going alone into his studio when I was young and feeling as if I was in a sacred space. He took so much care in looking after all his tools, brushes, paints etc and so the space felt like a temple. My great Aunt, Cythna Letty was an artist too, quite well known. She was a really amazing woman, a horticultural artist with a profound aura about her. I inherited her sense of wonder and love of the natural world. But apart from bloodlines I think I was always destined to make art. I can't remember ever deciding I'd be an artist it just always felt inevitable. Even as a young boy I knew I'd be making art in some way or another for the rest of my life and painting always felt like a language through which I would be able to communicate things I couldn't communicate in any other way.



Photo of Jonathan's studio by Gabriela Silveira

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR MAGICAL PROCESS AND HOW YOU ACCESS THAT CREATIVE ENERGY?

Environment is important, I need a studio with space and silence that allows for the tidal ebb and flow of order and chaos. But this is a practical consideration – essentially creativity isn't something that is 'on tap'. I have moments where it is flowing thunderously and other moments where it is just a trickle. I guess the trick is balance, and momentum. If I haven't been in my studio for a couple of days it is much harder to get into the right space to make good work so even on days when I'm not inspired I'll still go to the studio and put a full day in. I'll prepare canvases, make paint, sketch, work on collages, prepare large areas of colour – things that demand less creativity. And when the spark returns I'm ready for it. The one feeds the other.

But there are so many access points for creativity, and the joy of most of them is that they are completely random. It might come through intimate moments like the way the sun catches my wife's back as she's lying in bed in the morning or the chuckle of one of my sons in another room. Conversely it could be a flash of colour on a busy street, an emerald green lawn freshly mowed, a single note (heard) during a day of songs on the radio.

My work is primarily concerned with these moments, fizzing by, that illuminate life.



Photo of Jonathan's studio by Gabriela Silveira

DO YOU HAVE A RITE THAT GIVES YOU RUSHES OF INGENUITY?

In order to be connected I find it useful to be still. So I pause as often as I remember and connect with one of the 5 senses. I'll just stop and fall still and concentrate on, say, smell and stay with it for a couple of minutes and wait for the obvious associations to subside. Usually this practice brings me into a sharper focus, and gives a deeper connection with the moment.

I'm constantly battling with too much ritual though. It's useful to have some routine but at the same time habitual rituals leave me in a kind of malaise. Whenever my practice becomes too habitual I'll destroy the process and start again, building the work with just the essential elements. Francis Bacon describes how he'd use all his powers to create the ideal artwork – his vision of perfection – then willfully destroy it and resurrect out of the ashes only the most essential elements of the work. I try and do the same.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Anywhere, everywhere.



© Jonathan Freemantle

DO YOU HAVE ANY MENTORS IN YOUR LIFE?

I've had a few. First was my dad (he's still there), then my teachers. I was one of 5 students chosen for a one-off apprenticeship in London. There were 8 tutors, all 60+ and successful traditional artists in their own right who wanted to pass on their skills. We learned the basics (how to make paint, how to make gesso, gilding etc) through to the traditional techniques in painting, stone carving, geometry, modelling & etc. Of all of these teachers Charles Hardaker was the one I felt closest too. He was very kind, instinctive, almost ethereal and tremendously dedicated (he worked in his studio every day of the year, including Christmas). He has a painting in the Tate, which they hung when he turned 80 (apparently if you have a painting in the Tate collection they re-hang it when you turn 80, I'm aiming to have mine hung sooner!).

Currently I'm benefiting from the support and mentorship of a true patron of the arts, Robert McDowell. He was a close friend of Joseph Beuys' and has recently bought the former Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh to turn it into a multi-arts hub, now called Summerhall (www.summerhall.co.uk). It has the potential to be one of the biggest of its kind in GB and I'm delighted to have my studio there. I have an old laboratory which suits me perfectly. And recently I've connected with an artist I really admire, Callum Innes, who has kindly offered intuitive insights into my work, his work and his practices, which have really inspired me.



Photo by Gabriela Silveira

GIVE US SOME BEHIND THE SCENES ADVICE PLEASE.

Make the work you want to, how you want to and don't follow any trends. I've always found that when I follow something, or copy something rather than trusting my instinct I end up at a dead end. When I work from my own impulses/desires/passions/obsessions the feeling is entirely different and the way forward (even if it isn't always totally clear) constantly unfolds.

D.S. 2012


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