

Artist Talks - Manny Bamtefa_ac

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SPEAKERS

Manny Bamtefa, Edith Villasenor

E Edith Villasenor 00:01

Hello, welcome! Today is September 27 2019. My name is Edith Villasenor, and I'm here to interview Emmanuel Bamtefa about his new art exhibit Culture for the People at the Architecture Design Library. Thank you, Manny for being here.

M Manny Bamtefa 00:16

Thank you.

E Edith Villasenor 00:17

Thank you, UH Libraries for sponsoring this program. Emmanuel Bamtefa is currently a student at the University of Houston, in his senior year of School of Arts painting block program. Today, Manny will tell about his work, experiences and future plans. So to get started, could you briefly tell us about your background?

M Manny Bamtefa 00:38

I'm originally from Brooklyn, New York. Coney Island. I'm glad this is up here, keeps me in the spirit. Yeah. So I went to school in Boston before coming to University of Houston. I studied there for two years; I studied architecture. And I decided to transfer down here. I was trying to get into Rice. It was so expensive. I said I can come to U of H; they told me the program is just as good. So I studied architecture here my first year then I switched to fine arts. Because it was you know, I've been an artist all my life. It's always followed me.

E Edith Villasenor 01:20

That's when you knew you wanted to be an artist?

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Manny Bamtefa 01:23

It just didn't leave me for some reason. I ran away from it, believe it or not, for four years. I was playing basketball because my neighborhood is very influenced by basketball and I don't know if I put a basketball hoop here. Oh, I oh, that's a sneaker right. Starbury. Shout out to Stephon Marbury. I mean, that's his shoe, the Starbury. But anyways, I decided to major full time in painting after talking to Aaron [Parazette?] Yeah, I was double majoring. And then I realized that double majoring in architecture, and I was like, What am I doing? And then I just switched to painting, and I'm almost done.

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Edith Villasenor 02:15

And have you ever installed public art in other any other places?

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Manny Bamtefa 02:26

I once had a class where I was, I had to make a sculpture of a person and I made a sculpture of -- so I went to high school in Nigeria briefly, and they just make a magnificent evil creature that haunts people at night called a bush baby.

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Edith Villasenor 02:44

A bush baby.

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Manny Bamtefa 02:45

Yeah, you know about the animal. But this is like more, this is more of a short--

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Edith Villasenor 02:48

Just like a boogeyman.

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Manny Bamtefa 02:51

Not, almost like that, except the boogeyman is like, yeah, I saw a picture of a boogeyman with the bulgy eyes under the bed from the 70s or no, no, it was actually like, the 20s or something. And it looked like, looked creepy. But this guy was actually, the story behind this guy, he's like a dwarf that carries a mat. And you're able to grab his mat from it and he cries like a baby. That would haunt you for seven days, where you just have to keep your door locked. Yeah. And

then if you're able to wait those seven days, you're gonna become a rich person. So the creature I created looked like that. People were like, Wow, that's so nice. I'm like, I have horror stories behind that. Yeah, you know what, enough. So that was,

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Edith Villasenor 03:37

That's very interesting. So going back into your exhibit, what is your favorite piece?

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Manny Bamtefa 03:45

Other than Coney Island I would say it has to be the Watch the Throne piece.

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Edith Villasenor 03:54

Watch the Throne piece?

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Manny Bamtefa 03:55

Yeah, the picture I took. There was a picture I just came up with.

E

Edith Villasenor 04:03

Can you describe it first? How it looks?

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Manny Bamtefa 04:04

Yeah. It looks like a throne. It's on--sorry, I have to demonstrate this. It's on a chair that we found in the studios. And I said, How am I going to put a throne together? So I've thought about, about, what about African monarchy systems? How was it? How are they represented? Because I mean, it's I wouldn't say they were always European influenced. They were just as out there as European monarchs system. So I was I would try to envision, like, what did they have back then? I would go with some images and I'll see some like what if you look at the side of the picture, there's a skeleton, and I put that there because I saw like somewhere Southern Africa, one of the Southern African kingdoms I think was the [Ntandu?] people or the Kikongo people, they have like, skulls by this throne, and I'm like, Okay, let me put that in the picture. So I will take like garments, too, from like, that look very similar to Yoruba garments like what I have on, and I'll put that on the throne and I had this red, this really red vibrant blanket. And I put that on top of this chair as well, to make it, give it a sense of royalty, some sense of like, a triumph. So it could pop more. I mean that color red, it was very significantly throughout a lot of people's culture when it comes to royalty or anything significant. Oh, power. Yeah.

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Edith Villasenor 05:50

Okay, thank you for sharing that with us. What techniques do you use in your art? Do you have a favorite technique?

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Manny Bamtefa 05:59

Well, now, the series I'm working on now that's about to come up, I'm using a lot of collages and sketches. And what I did this summer was I picked up an art class I think it's something every artist should do, you know, by picking up an art class, you know, you might have a different art teacher. I think picking up an art class is a way to learn from another artist, you know, they this, they have another view of something that you've never seen before, and might spark your work, that might give you another insight. Because, you know, every artist is different. So I use that to, the collage, to sketch more before I actually draw because there's so many, the more you put, the more sourceful your painting becomes the more meaningful it is, the more to life it is. True to life it is. So that's. So my favorite process right now is collage, collage and sketching. But these paintings, what I did with them was I, like especially with this one I took off, this is a street sign. Did you make your canvases or did you purchase them? I made these two, instead of purchased. Yes. Yeah, I made these two canvases, I purchased. So yeah. Right. So I took most of the sources here you see where pictures and object that are very relevant to my childhood, and my upbringing, like cassette tapes, so that's why you have the pencil right there. Because when you, that's how you rotated the tapes to rewind them back then when you wanted to hear something. And the street sign and the shoe hanging over it was something I always saw, well, not particularly on a street sign, but it was over the wires. I told this to my mom, I said mommy, that means somebody died. She's like, don't say that, it means somebody just grew up and threw their shoe over the wire. I was like, you know, I mean, we had a good time growing up in Coney Island. That's a candy apple, Surf Avenue. Coney Island has three streets: Surf, Neptune, and Mermaid, which I didn't put. But Mermaid was like the main street for pedestrians. And then the other two streets were like, half pedestrian half this, close to the beach or close to Kaiser Park. It was a different city entirely. Trust me. And community.

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Edith Villasenor 08:36

And how do you know when you're when your art is done, as well, for example, when you're painting, like, when do you know to stop?

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Manny Bamtefa 08:45

So when you're painting, you don't really know when. There's no finish point. It's like, it's like music, right? Where, remember back in the days, not like today's form of music where everything's very repetitive, right, sounds the same, the pattern is the same, the length is the same. There was a time where when people made music, it was very, you couldn't know when it was, you had the length on the track, it was like 10 minutes long, but you would just listen to it. Because it's so much, there's so much expression to that one piece of music. Same with art. You know, maybe this artist wanted to say so much, like there's so much things I want to talk about here that I didn't know where to stop. So it was time for me to stop and I was like, Okay, now let me stop. I think people would understand where I'm coming from. Yeah. So that's when I decided to stop.

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Edith Villasenor 09:41

What are your influences? Do you have any favorite artists?

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Manny Bamtefa 09:44

I have favorite contemporary artists. I wouldn't say they influence my art. But I do have a lot of favorite visual artists like Well, I'm wouldn't say favorite but I love their art. My influences come from a variety of things. I would say my major influence however is through music. I'm very influenced by music. I would say music plays a huge part of my art. It tells a time, place, history, puts me in the mood of making art. I rarely make music about the art, I mean art about the music, which is what I want to start doing, actually.

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Edith Villasenor 10:30

Okay, and so what is your favorite place to see art?

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Manny Bamtefa 10:36

In Houston, I would say it would have to be like, maybe the Menil collection area, they have like they have all these striking few pieces every now and then. The MFAH not so much. They always have something secretive going on. And like what is that thing you know, you pay for, it's like a show you could have just-- well, no offense. I reserve my comment with that. But yeah, but that's not bad either. Like they had, I mean, Carlos Cruz Diaz. He's one of my favorite artists. Same with, I'm a very big fan of like,

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Edith Villasenor 11:24

We have one of his pieces here, in our public art collection.

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Manny Bamtefa 11:27

Oh, wow. I didn't know that. I actually went to the show, you know, when they came to the school, so I met his son and the director, what's her name, Martinez? I forgot her name. She's like the

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Edith Villasenor 11:42

Oh, Mari Carmen?

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Manny Bamtefa 11:43

Yeah, Mari. I met her. So we took a picture. She had these nice glasses. I said, where did you get those glasses? She told me it was, Anne et Valentin, that was where she got her glasses from. Yeah, then. Also, I like Jean Davis, the color field painter whose work I want to use to improve, I want to use his work in my, I want to use, I want to reference some of his works in my next series of paintings. Yeah, I feel like his work would show a good background to what I would like to do. One of my art, one of my favorite contemporary artists, that does things similar to what I'm about to say is like, I mean, I want to say, one of my favorite artists that does things where, that uses the color field painting expression in his work would be like, Derrick Adams, I don't know if you're familiar with him. He's a New York based artist. He's living in New York right now. He teaches at Brooklyn College. I'm also catching up on Mickalene Thomas, I really like the way she uses collage pieces to demonstrate her work and her models. I'm still studying more about them.

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Edith Villasenor 13:20

That's great. Yeah. So what's next for for Manny? What are your plans for the future?

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Manny Bamtefa 13:26

I plan to continue in art, to continue making art, to pursue this as a career. But also, look to work a regular job, like everybody else, so I can support my art.

E

Edith Villasenor 13:40

Right, nothing wrong with that.

M

Manny Bamtefa 13:41

I also hope to continue grad program. Maybe not in art, specifically, maybe in architecture? Maybe not? Who knows? I still have time. I've got two months, right.

E

Edith Villasenor 14:00

Yeah. Thank you. Do you have like a social media page or website that people can follow you on?

M

Manny Bamtefa 14:07

I have an Instagram. So my Instagram shows my art, shows my influences. I talk a lot about music, politics, by myself, things that inspires me, things that I find funny. And eventually, you do see where I'm coming from when you look at my art. So that's the kind, that's why I don't put my, specifically put my art. What I do. So my art page is bamtefa underscore and if you go to my Facebook, it's the art of Oluseyi. That's where my, actually if you just want to see my

imagery and my work. It's actually just there. So I don't share my Instagram ideas or stuff on my Facebook, it's different from the Instagram. But I use the Instagram to spark inspiration, it's like a it's like a society of its own place so I make the best of it.

 Edith Villasenor 15:09

All right, well, thank you Manny for sharing your time with us and your story.

 Manny Bamtefa 15:14

Thank you