

# EXPERIENCES IN SIRJANA COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

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Initially I found myself at a loss trying to pin down the crucial experiences and events that have underscored my six years relationship with Sirjana College of Fine Arts. I have decided to do away with all the superfluous details of life at Sirjana which most of you will eventually come to learn as your time here unfolds. So when we trim this fat down what remains is the bare essentials, which I feel comfortable to talk about. The essential and common experience we all will share in this case is art. There are two very indispensable experiences that everyone will have during their time in Sirjana which I experienced too.

First one is a positive one that will not only help you better yourself as an art student but will also help you evolve into a better human being. Another one is a negative one that holds the members of Sirjana back; teachers and students alike, from exploring their true potential and if it is addressed honestly will improve this institution and the services it provides by leaps and bounds.

Let me begin by giving a short introduction as to how I got involved in art and consequently with Sirjana. I am not one of those people who started drawing from a young age or even showed the slightest bit of interest in art. My introduction to the visual arts was when I joined the hobby class provided by Sirjana college. During this time I was



Bob Benjamin. **Limbo**. Woodcut Print on nepali paper, 12" X 9"

going through a phase where I was experimenting with different things and I had no idea of what I wanted as a career. I say experimenting but to be precise, I took up something and as soon as my interest waned I gave it up. This was the extent of my experimentation with music, writing, computers, designing, animation, car repairs and modification and the list goes on. I tried many things but just couldn't bring myself to imagine a scenario where I saw myself pursuing a fulfilling lifelong career in any of



Bob Benjamin. **Exercise in Futility**, Aquatint on Paper, 9.6" X 7"

the things I was experimenting with. But with painting that wasn't the case. I kept coming back to it. I started missing my computer classes first to spend more time at my "hobby art class". Then along with my computer class it was my designing class and soon followed my animation class. All these classes seemed inconsequential. I spent alternate days at the hobby art class and when I wasn't there I spent all my time drawing and looking up art and reading about art on the internet. My life took a turn I had not expected it would take; moreover I really liked it. This was what I was searching for.

I realized that I was intrigued by the process of visual art so much that nobody had to tell me to work hard and commit considerable time to it. I was doing that on my own. Whatever passion, dedication and commitment I was putting into it was self initiated

and it stemmed out of self motivation. So it was then I decided to give up everything else including my hobby art class and enroll in the courses Sirjana provided. Thus began my journey.

The irony of art school is that no one can teach you how to make art or good art at least. I know that now having spent six years at this institution. That being said what can be taught is the technical aspect of it. Art schools can only give you tools and techniques by the use of which one can unearth and excavate one's own truth and make art out of it. As is the case with learning everything new we start with the simple and progress into complex things. The basic shapes that we practice as a beginner will be used to decode, understand and relate visually something as complex as the human body. This process of simplifying so

you can get a better understanding of the complex organic whole not only serves one in the arts but also in life as well. Everything done and taught in Sirjana College, bears the mark of this time tested process. This method I believe will help ease in students into visual art, a new language, without intimidating them and helping them reap the benefits of a method that puts emphasis on a structured way of looking at art. Miyamoto Musashi the Japanese swordsman in his book "A Book of Five Rings" says "To know ten thousand things, know one well". That one thing that is worth learning and taught well in Sirjana is simplifying the process of visual art. This is one positive experience I believe everyone who decides to study in Sirjana College will have. The most obvious benefit of this method is that one acquires a working understanding of the means that govern successful artistic enterprise. You learn the rules so to speak. Once you learn the rules it is much easier to break them and once you learn the structure it is easier to deconstruct it and fit it to your individual need. Also, my time in the college and many hours of self study have made me aware that it isn't important to break the rules for the sake of breaking the rules. It all depends upon the manner of how we break the rules. If we as artists and art students don't just simply break the rules but strive to aesthetically break them then we create something worthwhile and enduring.

The process of simplifying that I mentioned above, the full comprehension of which no doubt will produce visually educated and aware artists capable of producing stimulating art. When we consider this fact the question that we have



Bob Benjamin. **Dog Shit**. Linoleum Print on nepali paper, 10.2" X 12"

to ask ourselves is – "Is every Sirjana College graduate a visually literate individual who can actively contribute to the local artistic community and the community at large?" Ideally we would want every graduate from the college to be visually literate and an active member of the artistic community. But unfortunately we know for a fact that this isn't the case. No matter how well a program is designed it all depends upon how it is implemented. The greatest hurdle to the program in the college is that students aren't given enough responsibility and are never held accountable for failure of upholding whatever little responsibility they have now. The remedy for this, if I may suggest, should begin with enforcing compulsory attendance, weekly and monthly assignments and evaluations



Bob Benjamin. **Foundation**, Cement, Metal Rod, 4" X 4" X 5"

and to make sure the students are held responsible the ones who fail to meet with the requirements should be penalized. We have a culture here in the college of procrastinating things and putting things off to the very last moment possible. This culture gives facility to students who aren't serious about art and come here to pass the time and at the end of the year submit in two or three assignments and pass the exams. This quite frankly is a disservice to the education that is provided here, it makes a mockery of the teachers who everyday take time out of their day to teach here for a meager salary and it is offensive to the students who put in the effort and commitment to work day and night to excel in their craft. Additionally, it devalues the final assessment exam and the marks obtained in it. Art is an interactive transaction. How can the transaction take place when one side of the involved party isn't present for

a considerable amount of the course time? The recently implemented final compulsory display is a step towards correcting this wrong. But it far from solves the problem. It addresses the issue but doesn't quite solve it.

This might seem like a harsh criticism but it is the truth and I only mention it here because I want Sirjana to improve. I won't the teachers and students here to have healthy, fruitful interactions. I also mention it in the hope that everyone will talk about it and give it the attention it deserves; that way it can be dealt with accordingly. We have to acknowledge the good along with the bad that is how progress is made. I have spent six years in Sirjana and I admit it is far from perfect but I believe that everyone involved with Sirjana will keep improving and evolving inching it ever closer to its goal of becoming a haven for artful practices.

Finally, I want to say art is a habit. It should be done daily.

It is like any other profession. It demands great sacrifice, hard work, perseverance and patience. I know this sounds unglamorous but that is the whole point. You should be driven to make art to such an obsessive degree that you know with unflinching clarity and absolute confidence that whether times are good or bad and under any circumstance you will make art. You will use it as the primary language to learn about your surroundings and express it. This is the most valuable experience Sirjana College of Fine Arts has helped me cultivate. So make art when you are happy, make art when you are sad, make art when you don't want to make art anymore and when you are done making art make some more.



***Bob Benjamin***

*Bob Benjamin, an alumni of Sirjana College of Fine Arts, is an enthusiastic art practitioner. His art practices range from the conventional to the unconventional.*

*Additionally he is interested in how history of art helps in shaping and evolving contemporary art, art in general and his own practice.*