

The following six essays will show six artists, examples of their work and their connection to myself and my work. A brief bio will be included on each artist as well as some basic background information.

I have included the following artists; Albrecht Durer, Fransisco Jose de Goya Lucentes, Peter Carl Faberge, Edward Gorey Charles Vess, and H.R.Giger.

Albrecht Durer was born in Nuremberg in 1471 and lived until 1528. He is best known for his woodcuts and his accuracy in painting the natural world. Albrecht Durer was born and raised in the arts being apprenticed to his father, a goldsmith, at an early age. Later he was apprenticed to the painter Micheal Wolgemut for three years and traveled for a time sharpening his technical skill.

Durer became so skilled both in the arts of painting and of observation that he gained favor and respect from those about him and in 1512 he became the court painter to the Emperor Maximilian. The 16th century brought a new interest in Humanism and science as well as a market for books, most at the time illustrated with woodcuts.

Durer's natural talent for precision and accuracy lent itself well to this media and he flourished. Durer was exceptionally learned, and the only Northern artist who fully absorbed the sophisticated Italian dialogue between scientific theory and art, producing his own treatise on proportion in 1528. But although we know so much about his doings, it is not easy to fathom his thinking. Durer seems to have united a large measure of self-esteem with a deep sense of human discontent. There is an undercurrent of obsession and such a high level of commitment in all he does it seems his work was a surrogate for happiness.

I have chosen two pieces of his work that have influenced me and that I have respect for. The first is possibly one of his most famous works, The large Turf. Painted in 1503 with watercolour and gouache on paper The Large Turf is more of a case study than an artistic representation. Durer painted this piece in Germany at the edge of a field, his attention to detail and amazing level of clarity and precision are what draw me to this painting. I have also included The Four Horsemen one of his fairly well known woodcuts. The reason I chose this particular piece is due to many aspects. I was brought up in a very religious household and have always had an interest in religious art since seeing the illuminated pictures in my father's bible. I also admire the level of technical skill woodcuts require and Durer shows his mastery of this craft. Once again I also admire the level of detail he has achieved. Realism and an eye for detail have always been a driving force in my work and Durer in my humble opinion is a master of both.

Jose de Goya y Lucentes was born in 1746 in Spain. He led a turbulent career filled with suffering, loss, and grief. Having lived through the Napoleonic wars Goya was witness to all the atrocities of man, he saw murders, rapes, and the deaths of seven of his children. Goya once the painter to the king fell out of grace and lived in hiding in fear of his life.

Goya finally fled to Bordeaux in 1824 at the age of 78 deaf, impoverished, sick, alone and unable to speak a word of French. One would think Goya would have been broken and miserable, but Goya being Goya wasn't miserable, and in fact seemed to gain a new lease on life, becoming enthralled with the world and all that was in it.

Goya's mastery in expressing misery and delight within a single subject has always been his hallmark. When one looks at Goya's work the conflict on whether to smile or wince. Goya seems to be able to effortlessly blend the sensual and the sick, finding the grim and the dark in life. He seemed to be able to find the cloud behind the silver lining instead of the converse.

The two pieces of work I have chose for Goya are Plate 39 from his "The Disasters of War" called "Great Deeds Against the Dead" and "Burial of the Sardine". The first piece "great Deeds Against the Dead" simply and gruesomely reflects the atrocities of war Goya was witness too. He etched the piece in 1810 and it is still one of his most remembered works and no one can deny the nightmarish yet strangely serene scene sticks in the mind like a worrying splinter, reminding us of the horrors of war. The second piece I have chosen "Burial of the Sardine" is an oil painting Goya took several years to complete starting it in 1793. Once again Goya combines the frivolous with the frightful, painting a picture of decadence and despair that only he could.

I have always felt close to Goya's work, as I frequently see the death and corruption and capability for evil in all things. However unlike Goya I seem to lack his unstoppable optimism and hope.

Peter Carl Faberge was born in 1846 in Russia, however his formal education and apprenticeship were in Germany. Faberge was brought up as a goldsmith and by the age of 24 he inherited his father's jewelry workshop in St. Petersburg, Russia. He was the head of the business for over a decade, producing jewellery and fine smith work similar to other jewelers of the time. Faberge also helped catalog and repair precious objects of the Russian Czars where he worked closely with his brother Agathon.

In 1882 Agathon also a trained jeweler started to work closely with his brother Carl. The two brothers made copies of ancient Russian artifacts. These pieces proved to be so successful that they decided to display at a fair in Moscow. This Fair is perhaps the turning point in Faberge's career. Czar Alexander III and his wife were in attendance and purchased a piece from Faberge, and being so impressed presented him with a medal honoring him with opening a new era in jewelry art.

Faberge became completely involved in goldsmithing, and spent his time trying to replicate techniques of earlier artisans, constantly experimenting with gold and enamel. Faberge became so accomplished that the Czar could not distinguish between the original piece and a copy of a snuff box in the Czar's private collection. The Czar was so impressed that soon after Faberge became the court jeweler.

Although Faberge is best known for his ornate enameled eggs, the two pieces I have chosen are "The cranberry sprig" and "The Orange Tree". I have chosen both of these pieces and indeed Faberge himself due to my formal training as a jeweler. The first piece "The Cranberry Sprig" I have chosen because of its simplicity and accuracy. The piece gives the impression of life even down to the cut of the crystal vase which gives the impression of being filled with water. I am also impressed with the delicacy of enamel work used to color the cranberries. The second piece "The Orange Tree" I have chosen because of its intricacy and articulation, the piece is clockwork and only stands 29.8cm. The orange tree opens to reveal a tiny bird which flutters its wings and moves its head and beak to a melody played by the piece. At the end of the melody the bird disappears back into the tree. The level of mastery and detail from the tiny leaves and flowers to the movement of the bird deserve respect and admiration.

Edward Gorey was born in 1925 in Chicago Il. He was an author and illustrator with a definite flair for the morbid. Gorey served in the US Army from 1943 to 1946 and then went on to graduate from Harvard College in 1950 majoring in French. In 1953 he moved to New York where he began illustrating books for Doubleday/Anchor, where he remained for 7 years. Gorey had his first book "The Unstrung Harp" published in 1953.

Edward Gorey was extremely prolific having nearly one hundred of his own books published as well as doing illustration and design work for other authors and theatrical productions. Many people have seen his work unknowingly and I myself remember the first time I saw his illustrations in the opening titles to the old television program "Mystery". Gorey seems to be able to capture a dreamy childlike quality with an obvious dark undercurrent. One has to look closely at his work to appreciate its full effect. In every corner and shadow seems to be some strange and fabulous creature just scurrying out of site. His illustrations of gardens and woods have such a feeling of hidden menace it causes the skin to crawl with morbid anticipation.

Gorey's books and illustrations are best described as dark fairytales, and children's stories quite inappropriate for children. His style is distinctive and reminiscent of the days of woodcuts, giving a sketchy, yet strongly defined effect. Mysterious dark mustached men in fur great coats, willowy women in evening dress, scruffy downtrodden street urchins and mysterious creatures all share the stage in his macabre stories.

Possibly my two favorite illustrations from Gorey are "After The Outing" the cover picture for his book "The Ghastleycrumb Tinies, and "Mystery" the cover art for the Mystery television program. Both pieces convey his feeling of mystery and intrigue, both at first glance seeming cartoonish and lighthearted but on closer observation become sinister and chilling. In "After The Outing" the combination of the gathered children and charming title give a feeling of innocence which is then belied by their keeper's grim visage. The characters in the "Mystery" piece all seem to be embroiled in some devious plot or deception with the police in hot pursuit. I have always admired and respected Gorey's attention to detail and the feeling of secrecy and mystery he incorporates in his work. It seems that with a few stray lines of the pencils he creates a feeling of mystique and morbid curiosity. Sadly Edward Gorey recently passed away in April 2000. He will be sorely missed for his talent and dark humor.

Charles Vess was born in Virginia in 1951. Even as a child Vess drew and painted, apparently he knew he would be an artist the moment he picked up his first crayon. Vess graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Fine Art. He lived in New York City for many years working for such publications as Heavy Metal and National Lampoon as well as several comic series.

Vess has become one of the most respected artist in the comic industry both for his illustrations in other peoples work as well as his own publications. He is most likely best known for his joint efforts with Neil Gaimen producing the award winning publications "Sandman" and "Stardust".

Charles Vess definitely deserves credit as an artist as his prolific works go far beyond simplistic comic art. He has won numerous awards and received acclaim for his renditions of "A Midsummer Nights Dream" and a retelling of "Red Riding Hood". Through his own Green Man Press, Vess has published the Ballads series, which he based on Scottish folk music.

Vess now lives in Bristol, Virginia with his wife in a renovated farmhouse surrounded by animals. He takes his inspiration from his surroundings as well as mythic literature and celtic mythology. He finds inspiration in the works of Arthur Rackam, John Baver and Ivan Bilibin. Such inspiration is obvious in any and all of his work. In the two pieces I have chosen to represent his work can have their roots traced directly back to these classical artists. The first piece is called "The Fairy Market" which was featured in the "Stardust" series. The piece has a wonderful dreamy fairytale feel completely appropriate to its content and the story line of the book. One can look over this painting a dozen times and find something new each time, finding a new little creature lurking or some secret event previously overlooked. The feeling of discovery and magic has enthralled me since I first saw the piece. I have drawn much inspiration from his attention to the finest expression and smallest gesture of his characters. The second piece is possibly one of my favorite pieces of artwork called "Midnight Grove" it is a pencil sketch designed for a short story in the "Sandman" comic. "Midnight Grove" conveys a strong feeling of mystery and the black and white media only add to the mysterious and secretive feel> the whole piece is both vague yet holds detail in crucial areas. The cats are shadowy silhouettes yet their eyes peer out from the darkness giving a feel of intelligence and purpose to this gathering. I have always had a fascination for secret places and the hidden lives of the creatures that share the world with us.

Where do you begin with an artist like H. R. Giger? He was born in Chur, Switzerland in 1940. His education was unusual consisting of strict Catholic schools and a “model” school in which the teachers were all trainees where the discipline was lax. This schooling left time for his imagination to grow, whilst the strict Catholic beliefs forced upon him in his childhood resurface over and over in his work. Giger’s childhood was otherwise fairly idyllic, spending time in the open countryside giving him inspiration for his famous landscapes. Giger’s further education came later in life, having to leave Chur due to bad grades he moved to Lausanne where he learned English. The real turning point came when he moved to Zurich where for four years he studied at the Zurich School of Applied Arts.

Giger’s first publication came in 1959 with the “Atomkinder” which was published in magazines such as “Clou” and “Hotcha”. He created his first sculptures in the summers of 1966-69 in Poiana, Tessin. These sculptures led to his involvement with film. Now Giger was gaining fame and popularity he could afford to take on bigger and better projects such as his famous “Necronomicon” and his involvement in Hollywood films such as Dune and Alien.

I have always had mixed feelings for H.R. Giger and his work. I admire his technical skill and strong individual style. I find some of his work amazing and enthralling. I am always amazed how he creates terrifying images with such a touch of delicacy. My feelings are split for him because I find quite a bit of his art nothing more than a hormone driven self-indulgent tantrum. I also find his philosophies on life somewhat dubious.

The two pieces I have chosen are “The Suitcase Baby” a sculpture and “Cataract” a painting he completed in 1977. “The Suitcase Baby” inspires me on several levels. I enjoy the feeling of dark humor it implies. It is also interesting in the combination of hard structured shapes and flowing organic forms. The most important aspect of this piece is the feeling of accessibility it creates as if it is art you can just pick up and carry around with you, to show your friends or just to worry people at luggage claim at Heathrow. This is an aspect of art I have recently become interested in after learning about “object poems”. The second piece, “Cataract” is a landscape which I feel shows Giger’s true brilliance. At first glance it seems like a painting of a waterfall, then the Eye is drawn into the landscape which seems to writhe and crawl with some unholy energy. Faces seem to leer out of the shadows and silhouettes of strange beasts flicker in the corner of your eye.

In conclusion all six of these artists tie together in several ways. They all exhibit classical brilliance, they all have an eye for detail and complete their work with precision. All of the artists seem to hide details in their work to constantly bring the viewer back for more. These six artists have and continue to be the biggest influences in my life. I find myself going back to their work again and again. I aspire to be able to achieve the same feelings and reactions in my work.

Source materials

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The Greenman Press. www.greenman.com

The Official H.R.Giger website. www.giger.com

The Web Gallery of Art. <http://gallery.euroweb>