

# 11 QUESTIONS

FOR ARTIST MARYNA BILAK

*Questions by and compiled by Robert Tomlinson*

Photo by Susan Sabino



**At what moment in your life did you realize that you were an artist? And how did that shape the important decisions you needed to make from that point forward?**

The moment I realized I was an artist came long after I started to paint or draw, or make things. Only when I began questioning myself why I make what I make did I start to consider my- self an artist. From that time forward

I wanted everything to be meaningful and speak about particulars. It became harder to make things. There was more time of inaction in the studio. And there were more spontaneity and deeper questions.

**Do you believe that art can be taught?**

Art is in a race with its interpretation. There is no grammar in making art, but rather a plurality of rhetoric. Craft is part of art making and craft can be taught and should be taught. It is good to know and have “tools” in case you want to use them to deliver your artistic message. What is the difference between a musician and a painter? Why should a musician learn how to play a musical instrument and how to read notes and spend all those hours of practice? I don’t want to take myself too seriously in the studio, but there is a desire to shoulder responsibilities for what I’m making and how I’m making it.

**Can you please describe your creative process and how it has changed over the last 10 years?**

I started to see in layers. Whether it is painting, or drawing, or sculpture, I learned how to build in layers and how to reconstruct in layers. Every layer is very abstract, but at the same time very specific and very important and cannot be skipped. And with this discipline came an amazing freedom in my touch. I’ve developed more respect for the materials and honor the knowledge that comes with them. And it is very important for me now that the subject matter speaks to the material I choose, and vice versa.

In terms of composition I’ve become more democratic— everything counts, everything is important, each corner of the picture plane is taken into consideration.

**How do you experience failure in your work and what are your coping processes?**

For me failure is another word for an experience. I have tried so many things. I keep trying. It is a good thing to fall, hit bottom and have the leverage to push yourself up with stronger energy. Failure brings a sense of richness. Failure brings possibilities.

**As you look back on your career, if you could do it differently, what would you change?**

Experiment more, and work as if I will die in a couple of years.

**What are you currently working on?**

I am sticking with my frescoes and plaster high reliefs. But there is a desire to get rid of intention of making a “work of art.” I want to be closer to cave artists and folk artists, where people actually made things for some practical/spiritual use.

Partly I know what I want, and partly I just watch to see what will emerge in my hands and I will collaborate with it. And, simultaneously, these days being a young mother I am absorbing the experience of motherhood, feeding my imagination, getting pregnant with new ideas.

**What other art forms have inspired you in your work?**

A weird combination of dance, cooking and embroidery always inspired me and felt very natural. I do all of those things and see so much in common. Among many characteristics there is a gesture, there is a color and there is a discipline.

**Would you give us an example or two of other artist's works that you admire and tell us why?**

There are too many of them and I don't feel like selecting just a few would be fair to the way I feel. And besides, I don't even know names of those who made cave paintings, or most of the African and Oceanic sculptures. Those are my true heroes. Even though I experience their work visually and look at it as pure art, I know that behind each work there was a practical purpose. And perhaps that is the key to the reason I'm so drawn to them.

**What is the hardest thing about being an artist?**

To stay honest to yourself without fear of being judged and misunderstood. Being authentic and trying to catch that change in my own growth and development is not easy. And even on an everyday basis it is hard to go to the studio and start doing something without any instructions: what, how and why are constant questions.

**What is the best thing about being an artist?**

The best thing about being an artist is the kind of freedom that gives you the permission to be willing to do something that may not work out. Making what you feel passionate about and at the same time walking on edge and not staying in a safe place gives such tremendous energy. I take it as a luxury calling myself an artist.

**If you were reading a review of your work, what would you want it to say?**

I do care about how people look at my work and what they see. I love my work to carry the dichotomy of being open and yet being mysterious. I love when viewers complete their own stories while looking at my work. I want people to relate and be engaged and to be challenged. The more comments on one piece, the better I feel about my work.

