Majoring in Art is more relevant than you think

I never thought what I would be when I grew up would be an artist. Art was something that had surrounded me in my everyday life growing up and honestly had become an after-thought really until I was a teenager. As I applied to colleges, my parents could see how much I loved studying art and encouraged me to the fullest to continue, even allowing me to go sixteen hours away to my dream school The University of Mississippi, Ole Miss. While this has been one of the most fun of adventures I have yet to explore, becoming an artist meant living with the stereotypes that came with it.

“You’re an art major?

Can you design/paint/draw me something real quick?” We do not approach pharmacies, doctors, lawyers, or other majors for free services so why do for artists? I do what I do out of love and believe in creating a reasonably priced product for the time, effort, and materials that were put into the particular piece or project yet there is a difference between the opportunity that benefits both parties and an “opportunity”, or chore that is one sided.

“You don’t look like an art major.”

I obviously know the stereotype and for a long time felt inferior when someone would say this to me. Was pink hair one of the requirements of my program? With time, I’ve grown to see my department as a melting pot. I’ve been blessed to work with a professor that was a talented female athlete in skiing before her art career and another teacher who was a graduate of Yale. I’ve had classmates that were majoring in subjects that were time-consuming such as business and engineering along with their art degree. We all express ourselves differently; some art students allow their let creativity flow like a water hose while others store their creativity for the right times. While I love all things unique, freeing, and sometimes downright strange, for me personally I want my appearance to be mine, even if it doesn’t necessarily stand out in the crowd. And I know my mom is appreciative I keep my hair and my palette separately.

“Why is your work so sad?”

This may sound crazy but when I present my job, especially my photography I love to see the emotions that viewers produce, even if it is negative. I found photography to be a storytelling, reflective process. Similar to writing in a way because freeing all my inner thoughts out in the open, allowing me to create images of situations I felt burdensome or overwhelming. When someone describes my work as “sad” I take it as their personal perspective of the imagery. All mediums of art have the power to be open ended. It goes along with the way we express ourselves and what we want. Some artists decide to take the other route and lead their viewers to subject or reactions yet it’s really about what your goal is. Do you want your audience to know your story or to create their own?

“That must be so fun!”

This stereotype is true in a lot of ways, yet sometimes it’s painfully not. A lot of magic is made being in the studio all hours of the night until it has been three days since you got to bed at a reasonable time or your job schedule is conflicting with the time you can get into work. With time management being your best friend, as an art major you need an endless amount of vulnerability. Constantly you have to put yourself out there, creating pieces that reflect you and then hoping your classmates don’t rip you apart. I had gone from being talented in a small but logical thinking group to being surrounded by insanely inspired individuals who were always creating. There were a lot of times I felt like I wasn’t producing enough and if I did create enough work I wasn’t pleased the finished outcome. I questioned my work and my purpose or how I could push myself to produce work I liked. The most challenging part to understand at times was one can choose not to study for a quiz with a chance of pulling off the grade. If you don’t have the project on critique day, there’s no way around it and your classmates will notice and then bring it up for discussion. It is better to attempt and fail, in the art world

“What are you going to do with that degree?”

I’m going to change the world, duh. No, but really. The art world is a small but endless bubble most don’t realize. Art school taught me not only about making art and polishing your craft(s) but what it means to be an artist. We are all artists in some way. We all find a passion, a talent, or maybe it’s a task that consumes our time yet pays the bills for the time being. In this, we have exciting, glamourous moments with our progression into our art but at the end of the day it’s all about pushing through moments of self-doubt, crippling fear, and frustration to create something that holds beauty and meaning to the viewer, ultimately hopefully improving the world around us.