

Where were you born and where do you live now?

I am a born and bred New Yorker, resident of Fort Greene, Brooklyn and a die-hard Mets fan.

Tell us about your education.

I realized I was an artist at age 12 when I had to choose where I wanted to go to high school. It was clear to me that the one constant interest in my life had always been drawing (while wanting to be a ballerina, scientist, etc) and that it probably would be forever. Luckily, I got into LaGuardia High School (otherwise known as the “Fame” school) where I majored in studio art, after an interview, 3-hour drawing test and portfolio review. After that I went to Cornell University where I nominally majored in Painting but made a series of interactive sculptures for my BFA thesis. Both were incredible experiences, as much for the exposure to my peers as the education they offered.

What is the one book you will regret never having read?

If I had to choose one book I guess I would say the Old Testament, but I don't believe in regrets because there's always an upside to every choice, even the stupid ones. Truthfully, I've always sort of wished I'd had a British public school education where I would have read all the classics in Greek and Latin. But realistically I would never have survived a week: I've never been good with rules or uniforms or authority figures and am completely incapable of doing basic “maths.”

What is your favorite ingredient?

Favorite ingredient... fresh thyme.

How did you get interested in art?

I don't remember a time before I was interested in art. I grew up surrounded by art and creative people, and started going to museums as a young child. In retrospect I now realize that not every child is so obsessed with colors, the precise wallpaper pattern in each room, the exact placement of throw pillows on the bed, the specific texture of a leaf, etc. A few years ago I figured out that not everyone sees every letter and number as being a different color. I guess I assigned those early on and to this day see all words as having very specific colors based on the colors of their individual letters. Do other people have that, and if so, is 3 green and 9 purple? Because they are to me.

How has your practice evolved over the course of time?

It is almost laughably the same except that now I have much more confidence in my gut instincts and don't think about how my process “should” go, look, how other people work, etc. My work is very intuitive, inspired by nature, life experience and my imagination.

My “practice” is as follows: I walk to my studio, which takes about 12 minutes. I unlock the door, say hello to my plants (I am obsessed with succulents), put my stuff down, and turn on WFAN during baseball season or music or NPR if its not too depressing. Then I work. Sometimes I dance around to salsa music or take a walk if I get stuck. When I'm done, I go home or out for Thai food with my husband.

Since college I've had the same piece of cardboard on my wall, with a James Baldwin quote in Sharpie: “The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers.” I hope that if I have a practice this is it.

What do you consider to be your greatest success?

Making work that I'm really excited about and keeps me up at night mulling over ideas. Even though I'm tired and should probably sleep.

If you could ask yourself one question, what would it be and how would you answer?

Q: When are you going to get health insurance already?

A: Good question.

I've read that your cut paper has a life expectancy of 2-3 weeks. Why is this? Does the basic white drawing paper lose its starch? If this is the case, paper is kind of like skin in that it, too, loses its "starch," only we use other words to describe it, like elasticity. "A skin loses its elasticity like paper loses its starch." Is this analogy accurate?

Hmmm, I'm not sure where you read this but that is not the case. I've had installations up for months at a time and will have one Museum of Arts and Design in NY for over 4 months starting in September. Paper does change, of course, depending on the weather, humidity levels, etc. On wet days it may sag a little but it will rebound on dry ones to its original form. Most galleries are climate controlled, so this is rarely an issue.

Paper's changeability is part of its appeal—I love that it has a life of its own, and is ephemeral in nature, just like exhibitions, clouds, weather, life, time, seasons, belief systems, species, etc. I think of my work and my process as a balance between chance and control: paper provides an element of chance that is integral to this work.

What do your installations look like after 2-3 weeks? What is done with them?

They look the same after 2-3 weeks provided there is climate control and no fires, floods, etc, just like any work. On my website I have a "How it Happens" photo essay that shows the process of transporting, installing and de-installing the work. And a little after-party debauchery for fun! http://mpearlman.com/install_shots.htm

My penultimate question is a stream of consciousness: Did you know, before you started your first cut paper piece, when it was still an embryo inside you, did you know that what you were about to create would be so temporary? How do you describe this process? Among these words – Extinction, Decay, Rebirth – which, if any, would you consider the most fitting descriptor? Is this process destructive or regenerative?

I'm not crazy about the embryo metaphor—if I were male would my ideas be compared to childbirth? I certainly don't imagine they come from my ovaries, much less require someone else to fertilize them!

The temporary, ephemeral character of my work is very intentional. I am interested in those moments in which it's impossible to tell if a form is contracting or expanding, coming or going, etc. The ambiguity of form, the fact that everything in life is in flux, that we are not really in control although we might like to believe so, the constancy of change—the ephemeral form of the work reflects the ideas within. If I had to apply a descriptor to the work it would either be "ephemeral" or "ambiguous."

Lastly, how do you feel about writer's burning their manuscripts?

I don't know but I'm a fan of cremation. Into the fire!