

Arteaser

Meet the Artist

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Philippe Jestin

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*It was neither dark nor stormy when I got a tip that someone in the neighborhood had blood red liquid dripping from the walls (even the ceiling!). That was how I found myself at **Philippe Jestin's** apartment during Open Studios in October. He had an alibi, but the case wasn't cold, so I came back in January for the whole story. This time it really was dark. And sort of stormy (for California).*

Philippe Jestin has loved to play and draw since his childhood in a small town south of Paris. His favorite toy, however, was a puppet theater, for which he made puppets performers:

"Art was always in the background, for me. It was always something that I enjoy [...] I was always looking for things to do with my hands or playing with stuff and materials and ideas and being creative, doing some theater or things like that, just playing a lot. "

Nonetheless, Jestin started university studying Biology, where he had concentrated his efforts in high school. But after a year, he decided to leave, along with several friends, and study art at La Sorbonne:

"What you study in school, somehow you kind of feel like that is what you gotta do. When you try it and it doesn't work, go back really, I believe, to what is really essential. It's kind of falling back on what is dear to you in some way"

Studying "arts plastiques," Jestin was able to reconnect with his creative expression with little restraint:

"It created a very, very free environment - not a lot of material to work with, but a lot of freedom to do basically whatever you wanted [...] Some would say there was too much freedom to do whatever you want and in the end, for me, it was a very beautiful environment, very creative"

Eventually, Jestin's focus shifted to 20th century American artists, like **Mark Rothko**, **Clyfford Still**, and **Robert Rauschenberg**. Not knowing that he would soon be in the US himself, he did part of his masters degree on **Jasper Johns' flags**:

"At that time in art school - it was not really clear what I wanted to do. I wanted to find myself in some way."

After graduating, Jestin first tried becoming an art professor, but didn't pass the standardized exam - something he doesn't regret. Having met his future wife in Paris, Jestin returned with her to Westchester County in New York state:

"I went to work in a catering business and learned a lot about cooking. I mean, I always enjoyed cooking, but this time it was really another dimension. It was great - it was a good experience for me"

The couple enjoyed a visit to San Francisco in 1994 and moved to the city a year later, where Jestin was able to focus more on his art. Just as he had struggled with Biology under notions of expectations, Jestin did not immediately find himself as an artist:

"I was working on paintings, combining objects in paintings, trying to kind of... I don't know, maybe trying to be too much like something I'd learned that I needed to be and not really myself. And then I went back to things I really like to do, so I went back to work with clay and modeling"

It was in this mode that Jestin began experimenting with resin, building up layers of drips to create textured, sculptural elements. He pushed further, discovering the use of the resin to create flat, organic shapes:

"I really wanted to use the resin as a painting material in some way, but [including elements of] relief. I started to carve wood surfaces and just pour the resin in it and combine it with some relief, some plastic pieces basically, and the resin would come up [as the negative space]"

That epiphany has led to a series of silhouette pieces. Jestin pushed further, adding elements of movement. With some works mounted on an axis to rotate and mobiles hanging from the ceiling, not unlike puppets dangling from strings, Jestin often finds that his works play with light in unexpected ways:

"The aluminum pieces [which have translucent resin shapes] have an element of surprise. When the light comes on to them there's all sorts of shadows"

Staying true to his interest in organic shapes, Jestin has also grown interested in lines, abstracting the line of a ribbon as it is wrapped around the leg or fishnet tights as they are worn:

"I'm very interested in the lines, in drawing [...] around the body [...] I do a lot of work now with lines"

His pipeline of projects grows larger and broader still, with his latest series, Bloodlines, based on fifteenth and sixteenth century portraits:

"[Bloodlines] probably doesn't fit into what I'm working on right now, but at the same time I felt totally drawn to go into this direction and there's more to come"

Between mobiles and profiles, bloodlines and fishnets, Jestin's work stays fanciful and fluid:

"I like it to be playful [...] Everytime a kid comes in [to my studio], he goes really nuts, with the colors and the candy-like feeling of the resin, [...] and I really enjoy that!"

Philippe Jestin shows at **HANG Gallery**. Watch the **Arteaser Calendar** for future shows.