

LIFE *after* SCHOOL

JAMES CHASE

James Chase, BFA Interdisciplinary, 2010, is not afraid of taking chances or working hard, two attributes that have helped him achieve remarkable growth during his time as a student and now as a professional working artist. Starting in high school, James understood his need to create art and to be proactive in order to fuel his passion, even if it wasn't going to be easy. He

began an internship at the Institute helping out around campus in exchange for a class per semester. This was in 1999, when the BFA program was in its infancy. It wasn't until 2003, and after joining the workforce for several years, that he made a personal commitment to pursue his BFA.

Since that time, he has worked dutifully to hone his artistic voice and skills to create work that can be described as eclectic, independent and unmistakably, "James Chase." He creates dense work out of metal, wood and found objects. "The creation of my work is the result of stitching together aspects of sculpture, painting, printmaking and photography," he says. "My work usually begins with a solitary idea and evolves into a matrix once a sense of ambiguity and form is achieved. Materials scavenged from flea markets, junkyards, discount stores, dumpsters and alleys make up my sculptures. Rarely do I map out a work before construction."

James worked diligently to balance study and working long hours in retail during the nearly eight-year timeframe in which he pursued his degree as a part-time student, a timeframe that may appear nontraditional to many, but something that James says was the best path he could have chosen. "I feel that taking the nontraditional route has been an advantage to me as an artist. I built great artistic relationships with the faculty, and they have helped me hone my voice because of this," he says. This time also put James in a unique position as a student at the



JAMES CHASE / at the Annual Student Exhibition, 2010

"I believe my job as an artist is to create works which evoke emotional connections, to articulate a personal vision, and develop ideas by taking chances."

— JAMES CHASE, '10

peers, particularly through studio critiques. "I was asked to defend my work a lot," he says, "and not use it as a formula, and that's how the printmaking aspect of my work came about."

Since graduating from the Institute, James has chosen to focus largely on printmaking, and has already made great strides in advancing his career as a printmaker. He took a chance on reaching out to well-known printmaker Tom Huck, owner of Evil Prints Studio in St. Louis, MI. After several email interactions, Huck invited James to work alongside him at his annually organized, weeklong Woodcut Boot Camp, where James and the nine other participants immersed themselves in printmaking and Huck's expertise. The prints James created

Institute during a rapid growth period. "An advantage of being a part-time student for an extended period of time, was the ability to see the quality of faculty and facilities increase," he says, speaking fondly of the appearance of the Institute's first digital labs to the substantial growth of the printmaking facilities.

During his time as a student, James received several scholarships as a result of his artistic and academic success, and worked as the printmaking studio assistant, helping to lead classes, manage studio maintenance and inventory, and serve as an onsite advisor to students. He credits his interest in printmaking to his time interacting with faculty and

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while at the camp were well-received and this past fall they were exhibited in a group print show at the Slocumb Galleries at East Tennessee State University.

Immediately upon returning home from Woodcut Bootcamp, James honed his networking skills even further by contacting Sean StarWars, another renowned printmaker whose work he admired. "I emailed Sean and mentioned I had just been to Tom Huck's Woodcut Bootcamp and offered to help Sean at any upcoming events," said James. StarWars took James up on his offer to assist him at Prints Gone Wild, a printmaking fair at which he was exhibiting in New York City. James assisted StarWars with every aspect of the fair, including setting up the booth and selling prints. His experience at Prints Gone Wild led James to even more opportunities and admired artists, and he continues to keep reaching out to those he looks up to. "I just keep plugging away," he says, "and networking myself into the print community." James will continue his relationship with both Huck and StarWars when he attends the Southern Graphics Council print conference's Printmakers Ball this March in St. Louis. He will sit alongside both artists at his own booth where he will display his body of work.

His goal for the future is to attend graduate school and major in printmaking, and he is currently applying to several schools throughout the country. Beyond that, he expresses his desire to work both in academia and as an artist as long as he can make a body of work and inspire others. While still in his hometown, however, he continues to contribute to the local arts community. He was recently elected to the Manchester Arts Commission (MAC) by Mayor Ted Gatsas. As an art

commissioner, James' duties will include promoting, fostering and building the local arts community. Since becoming a commissioner, Chase has been put in charge of web development and online content as well as the creation of MAC's new logo. Chase has also assisted in press releases and graphic design for letterhead and business cards.

James attributes much of his early professional success to his years at the Institute, "The Institute gave me the ability to find my way and push me and enabled me to have a well-rounded foundation by offering a great exhibiting artist roster," he says. He also credits his friends and fellow students for their help. "I've been inspired by so many of my fellow classmates and looked up to them," he says. In addition, James' motivation and networking skills have also contributed to his growth, and he advises students to do the same. "Reaching out to professional artists has been extremely beneficial to my own growth as an artist," he says. That first-hand experience of working with other artists has also been helpful in learning how to install a professional looking show.

As James moves forward with his artistic endeavors, he exudes a simple self-confidence around his role as an artist that has clearly come from his years of hard work and risk taking. "My art making process comes from the basic need to tell a story or evoke emotion. It's as basic and as complicated as that," he says. To students who are discovering their own artistic voices, James offers this sage advice: "There is so much merging and slicing of styles of art, it's easy to get caught up in all the conceptual and multiple techniques. Be truthful to yourself and make lots of mistakes. Your voice will come through with that." ■



An installation by James Chase

