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[This post was written by Kristen Camisa (Illustration, '18)]

On a hectic pre-Irma Wednesday, I was lucky enough to sit down with Joe Fig, our new Fine Arts and Visual Studies Department Head, and learn more about his life, work, and pizza preferences.

Joe earned his BFA and MFA in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts, New York. He is known for work that explores the creative process and the spaces where art is made. His paintings, sculptures, photographs, drawings, and videos have been exhibited nationally and internationally with over thirty solo and fifty group exhibitions. He is the author of *Inside the Painter's Studio* and *Inside the Artist's Studio* (Princeton Architectural Press), which share an intimate view inside the studios of today's leading artists.

What were you like in college at SVA?

I had very long hair. I was a Fine Arts major. I did sculpture and in my senior year only painting. I had lots of friends in other departments and was ambitious. Loved being in New York but also liked to have fun.

It sounds stupid... girlfriends and breakups were always a struggle. As far as academics, painting, or my studio work I was always actually very dedicated to that. I had a quest for learning as I didn't grow up in an arts family.

How is adjusting to life in Sarasota, coming from New York?

So far, I've loved Sarasota. But it's very timely with the hurricane season approaching and it's a little... scary. But I was told that hurricanes never hit Sarasota so I'm hoping that will continue. I heard the Native Americans used to come here to escape hurricanes!

How does working with students inspire you?

When you've been working as an artist as long as I have, at certain points you become weary, and it's often a struggle to come up with new ideas and new bodies of work. I appreciate the freedom the students have to pursue anything that their hearts desire.

CRISTIN TIERNEY

What are 3 must-haves in your studio?

A horseshoe for good luck, a good contemplating chair, and lots of artwork around me—lots of color. [Referring to the artwork in his office] I call this my “wall of detritus” - it’s objects other artists have given me from their studios: used pallets from some painters, some tools. I started asking them to give me stuff and they did.

What do you hope to impart to Ringling students?

I hope to impart a sense of excitement to them about the work. Being an artist is really hard and you have to train as if you’re an Olympic athlete because there is a bunch of other artists around the country and the world who are training just as hard.

There’s a lot of reward in being an artist in how you see and view the world, and in the relationships that you build in and after college. You’re not only leading life as an artist, you’re leading a creative life and that generally entails relationships with friends who are creative types also. That’s really a great way to go through life.

But being an artist is hard and it takes a lot of dedication and hard work, ambition, a little bit of luck. But you also have to believe in the work that you do. I’d say I expect them to push themselves to make work for themselves and to not be afraid to fail... and if you’re going to fail, fail gloriously.

If you had a superpower, what would it be?

Well, I actually tell the students what you’re taught is how to see, and that’s your superpower. That’s what you have over your friends who went to liberal arts school. And for me that’s happened. I’ve noticed it when I drop my kids off at practice for lacrosse and I’m walking across the field back to the car. It’ll be like 5-6pm and I’ll see the way the sun is hitting a blade of grass with the dark green underneath and a beautiful bright green... I see it and I’m like “Oh my God that is amazing!” and then I just kind of keep walking. And other people don’t see that. Or even now talking to you the relationship with your head how it curves around with the space behind you, your pink case underneath your laptop how it relates to the pink on the paper over there. I feel I already have my superpower!

Word association!

Pranks

Love ‘em.

Sleeping in

Miss it.

Photoshop

Incredibly helpful.

Karaoke

Don’t do it.

Pineapple on pizza

Clams on pizza.

Hurricanes

Don’t understand.