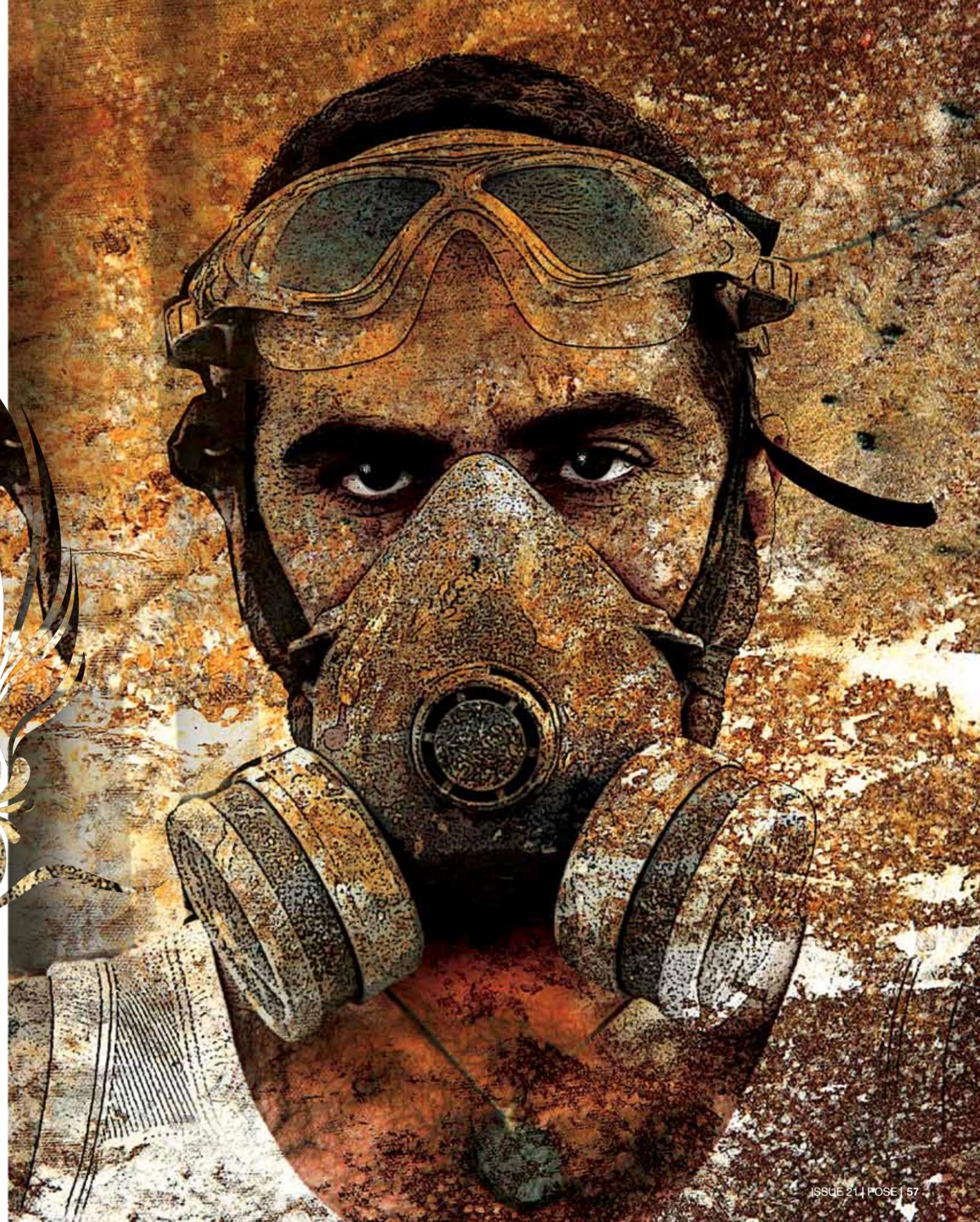


hady beydoun

THE SOULFUL ARTIST

Hady Beydoun from Lebanon is a volcano of creativity and his self-expression finds its way in to illustrations, sculptures, paintings, furniture, clothes, bikes, cars, walls, skin and more. His work reflects the human condition and each work of art tells a unique story. Here he is in conversation with Parul Gahlot.





What attracted you to the world of fine arts?

On one hand I have always been impressed with the ability to convey a feeling with a brush stroke, to materialize an abstract thought, to tell a story in a painting, to say so much in so little, and on the other hand, I have always marvelled at the technical skill and the sensitivity it requires to dive into the smallest details that make up an impressive whole.

Art is rebellion made visible, made permanent, and only when it is perfectly executed, a piece of art becomes somehow 'divine'. Divine not in a religious sense, divine because it stands as a solid proof of perfection in an imperfect world. Perfection is the state of being an end in itself, not needing anything from the world to complete it; a melody, a poem, a sculpture, a painting, a gothic cathedral, a man made object whose sole purpose is to please the eye and to communicate with the inner self. In other words, what draws us to art is this simple yet innate quest for beauty and goodness.

Tell us about your cultural and educational background.

Academically speaking I studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut (class of '96) and the rest of it comes from a big array of books that interest me, travel, observation and interaction with so many different mind-sets.

Do you think all artistes are philosophers?

I think all philosophers are artists, artists of ideas, where every idea triggers a picture, poses a question or defines an answer. Philosophy is the art of thought, and art is philosophy made visible in colour, sound and form.

Where and how do you find inspiration for your work?

Inspiration comes from an infinite

number of sources however, inspiration ultimately comes from ideas and questions which in turn come from the incidents that happen to us, and the circumstances around us.

A peaceful state of mind provides as much inspiration as a troubled one. What's in common in both cases is the degree of observation we retain in either case. Observation provides us with an answer that we define as inspiration.

There is certain angst and a spirit of rebellion associated with your work. Is there a reason behind this?

Angst and rebellion are both adjectives of the human condition, one that refuses to conform, to settle for less, or to accept the norm.

Personally I find that both the states of rebellion (anger at the world or the self) and acceptance are the points of departure for any thought that is bound to be expressed in an artistic form. This is the fountain of youth, the active agent of keeping life rolling at a comfortably exciting pace.

Angst comes from the disappointment, the disenchantment I have felt at a certain point in my life, the point where it dawned on me that the world around us is not the same world we live inside our heads.



Which artists do you admire the most? How have they influenced your work?

What inspired me the most is the 90's wild rock scene attitude. The rebellious attitude of rock singers and musicians of that era, the powerful aftertaste of their music and hopelessly romantic lyrics have opened countless doors for me.

Painters I admire are Rembrandt for his sharpness and darkness and his impressive sensitivity to light, the small notes played by the most subtle shades of grey and his dramatic use of colour. Dali for his dream-like freedom I feel when looking at the details of his work. Tamara Delempica for her confidently straight lines and angles that give her characters a superior, unbreakable, unshakably strong attitude.

All these influences are like small separate rivers that pour into the self; they mould it and taint it each with its own particular vibe. What comes out later on is a dreamy kind of rebellious attitude that manifests itself in a new way.

What role if any does the city play in your work?

The city we live in somehow becomes a reflection of much of our inner architecture and the opposite is true.

Pieces of Beirut, its chaos, it's hardness, its scars, and its still oozing wounds are very obvious in the worn out and sometimes crowded look that is manifested in my work.

Do you remember your first 'work of art'? Who saw it? Were you encouraged by that early feedback?

My first work of 'art' was on a T-shirt. I was 14 years old and all I wanted was to look and be different from the other kids at school and in the neighbourhood. It was my mother who encouraged me the most. She would buy me paint and take my side when my dad came home and got angry with me because he thought I was 'wasting my time' painting instead of studying.

Did I get good feedback? Yes I did. All the kids in the neighbourhood asked me to paint their T-shirts and I did. That alone was enough motivation for me to willingly and lovingly spend daily long hours painting and day dreaming while of course, listening to loud metal music (a habit I still have).

Was there a period when you struggled to make it as an artist? Tell us the difference between struggle and success. How did it affect your work?

What is struggle? Is it when you have to do something you don't feel like doing? Is it working on a deadline? In either case I found it a challenge to beat time, to be on time, in my head, to conquer. Every small step I took felt like a victory, to render an eye that says something, a drop of water that makes you want to touch it, a curve so fine it gives you a heartache... Small things like that made my day, made me want to do more the next day.

The struggle came later, many years later, it came when I gained everything and lost myself, when I lost sight of the shore, my safety, you know the story of the albatross that got shot by the mariner? Well I shot the albatross and fell down with it, so down, it took me eight long years to climb back up.

The struggle is the climbing up process. The step by step uphill, no rest, a never ending test.

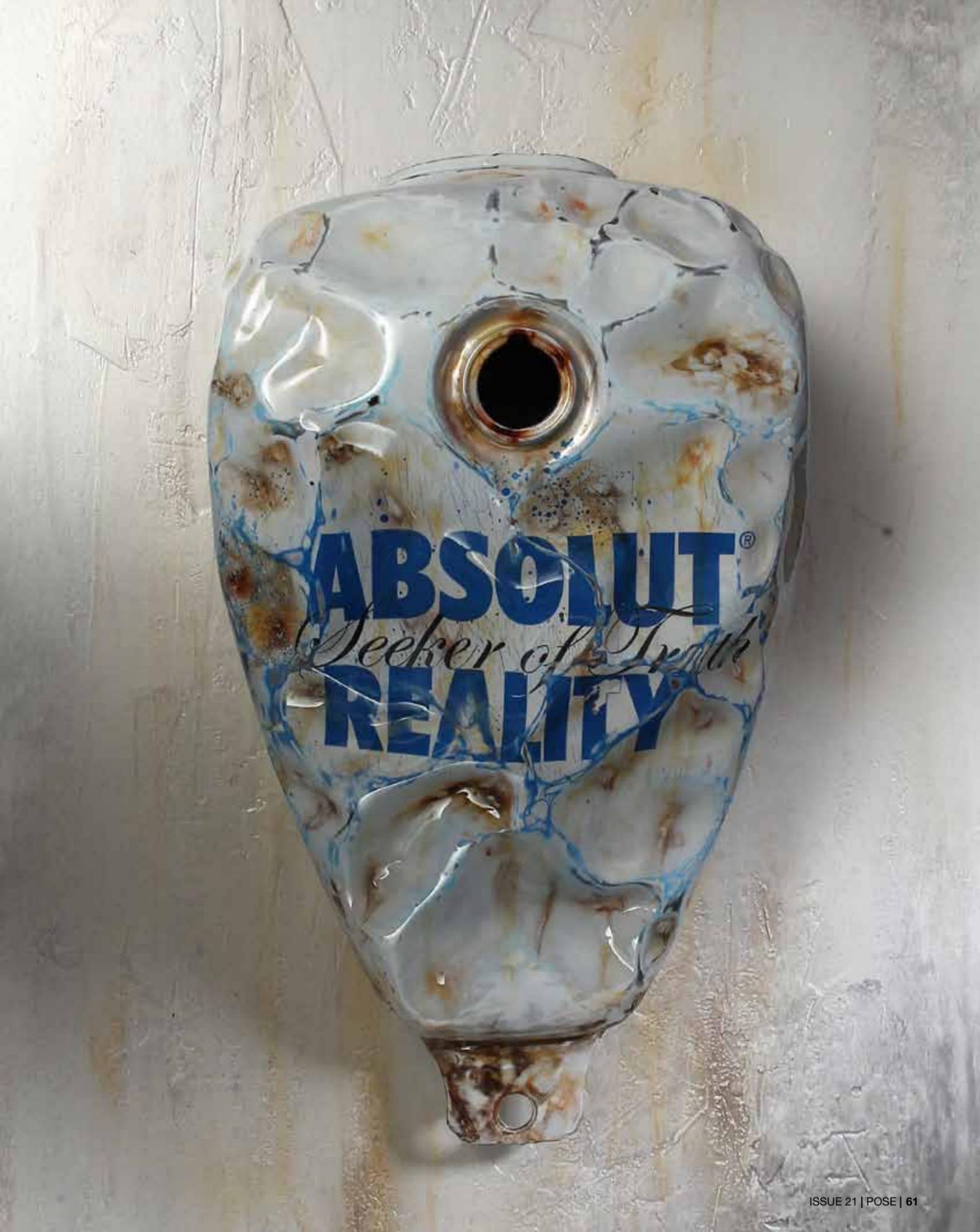
How did studying in an architecture school affect your work?

All the credit goes to the professors who made this program happen the way it did and still does. What I learned at that school is a discipline, a structured way of thinking, a practical way of solving problems, visual and structural problems, balance, and most importantly how to turn an abstract thought into a tangible object.

A way of thinking follows you with everything you do, you fine-tune it here and there and as time passes by you realize that your whole life has been defined by a specific way of thinking or another.

The critique given in class, the objectiveness of the whole process really teaches you something; that when you hang your project on the wall, you keep your ego in your backpack.

Most importantly, you learn about professional ethics, and that is what really takes you far in your success, very far.







Which media are you most comfortable expressing yourself in in terms of illustration and paintings?

Oh I love all media, each one has its charm and mood, but my favourite is liquid acrylic paint and an airbrush. I love it because it is very unforgiving especially when I'm painting on metal, one small mistake and you have to redo the whole thing. It is the most uncompromising things in life that attract me the most and yet, it is precisely this uncompromising medium that has taught me to have a more forgiving attitude - towards my imperfect self and towards the imperfect world around me.

You're a complete artist in the sense that you not only express with colours you're a poet as well. Why words?

Words describe ideas, ideas are our world, the whole universe is one idea made up of an infinite number of ideas, our attitude is a set of ideas, everything we see around us is an idea, ideas are everywhere they are everything.

With words I have always tried to put my finger on the ideas that shape me at any given moment, what am I, who am I? These were the main questions haunting me for many years.

Then I discovered that I am an infinity, a void (like a hose) through which an infinite number of ideas can pass through and shape, like a river coiling its way through mountains and valleys.

Writing is like therapy to the self. Then I learned how to channel and direct my ideas rather than allow them to direct me!

What do the words 'urban' and 'modern' mean to you? How do they reflect in your work?

I hardly ever use these two words. I see through my work my personal journey from darkness to light, and light only comes from darkness. By darkness I mean anger and sadness, the state of the world now.

What shows through, especially in the wood sculptures (the Coca Cola & co. cans) is the way I felt inside for a while (especially during the war of '06). I felt like a discarded soda can: old, used, abused, expired, crumpled, deformed - but then again, looking at such a

can made flat on the street because some car went over it, I couldn't help but notice how bright its colours still are! It's like still trying to seduce you with its colours and slogan advertising 'the same great taste'!

As if it was refusing to die. A cheap and mass produced FMCG item refuses to die! It's still fighting beyond the grave, how brave! So I made a tribute out of it, a tribute to the self, myself, to remember not to give up (7-up) and to recharge the mind and soul with hope and endurance (Duracell) and several other themes.

Tell us about the surfaces that your colours have covered. What is unique about some of them?

I have painted on almost every material you can imagine, from wood to glass passing through concrete, stainless steel, aluminium, and metal, fiberglass, plastic, and plexi-glass, textile, canvas, paper and cardboard. Each surface has its advantages and disadvantages depending on what you have in mind however; technically speaking some of them are more forgiving than others.

Canvas is the most forgiving in the sense that you can fix as many mistakes easily compared to painting on metal or wood where one mistake means starting all over again.

How do you envision your future as an artist?

I have absolutely no idea about that, all I know is that the future is an extension of the now, but I can never tell how what I do now will evolve in the future. I'd rather let it be a surprise!

What is the most beautiful work you've ever created? Do you have a favourite work of art? Why?

Yes, I have two most favourite pieces. One flowed naturally and easily in a matter of hours, and the other took around a year in the making. Both are nudes, the first is black and white on paper ('96) and the other is black and silver on aluminium ('06). One was a challenge and the other was during a struggle. They are my favourites because they are almost flawless, not needing anything from the world, mysterious, and born out of pleasure and pain.

What is the best and worst part of being an artist?

Tough one... I think being an 'artist' has nothing to do with anything. The word 'artist' is a social term that defines people who work with colour, performance, and music, but then again, art is an attitude. The self is a piece of art, in some cases rough and in other cases fine.

What is the best and worst part of being yourself?

The best part in being yourself is when you are okay with who you are, the worst part is when you are not. Being okay with the self or not happens to all of us during different phases of our lives regardless of our daily occupation whether it is painting or training or doing an office job.

Having the technical ability to express the self is a special kind of freedom, and believe me, it is no different than the thrill you get when you go speeding on the highway (because both make you feel powerful) however, the difference is that when you produce a painting or a sculpture it can outlive you, and the proof of your power is preserved in it, and that's part of what's rewarding about it.

The other part is when you feel your work is being appreciated, it is in a way, the same kind of pleasure you get when your guests at dinner are impressed with what art you cooked with your own two hands.

What message would you like to send out to budding artists?

Patience and hard work pay off.
POSE

