

## Moonlight bunny napping

An interview with Daniel Cabrillos Jacobsen  
By Melchior Jaspers

Daniel Cabrillos Jacobsen and I first met in front of the Cobra museum during the opening of the exhibition 'Freedom without Borders' on the 1st of June 2023. Our mutual friend and artist David Noro introduced us to each other. What followed were three studio visits in a short time in the run-up to Daniel's final exam presentation at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague at the end of June. What struck me in his work was his own strong and at the same time sensitive visual language. And I thought it was remarkable how far he had already developed as an artist, especially for someone who was still at art academy.

MJ: Daniel, can you explain to me why you paint?  
DCJ: I paint because it is a way of escaping into my imagination. As a painter, you are the person in charge of what is going on in front of you. You are the judge and you decide what you want to express. When I create a painting, my imagination becomes tangible as it unfolds through the physical process of painting. I can constantly evaluate and make decisions, allowing me to modify my desires. I paint, because it gives me an opportunity to play around with something in front of me and make it my own. I can apply colours, and shapes. I can paint people, animals, cars and vases. The list is endless. I like the process of going through the different stages of painting. Some phases can be challenging, while others come with joy. There is a lot of satisfaction when I finish a painting. It becomes a space where all the decisions I took, finally can rest well and dwell together. That's a fantastic feeling, sitting in the studio and realising that your painting is done.

MJ: How do you start a painting? Do you have a clear idea where you want to go with the painting before you start?  
DCJ: The starting point can be anything: a colour or a certain composition for example. It could be a reference from a photograph I took or it could also begin with an elimination and limitation. For example I sometimes use the rule 'no figures, only space' in my paintings. Because I am often working quite intuitively, it's hard for me to envision the end result in the early stages of the painting, and it's therefore important for me to just begin. I apply paint and see where it takes me. I need to be able to play around with the composition or to play along with the rhythm of the colours. I like to have multiple paintings going on at the same time, so I have the freedom to go back and forth between the paintings. Then my decisions can get a little rest, and I can evaluate if a choice was right or wrong. By working intuitively and less calculated, it often comes with failure and not getting it right with the first try. Then I have to search for a solution on how the painting can get on track again.

MJ: You sew the fabric of your paintings together and you make a lot of frames yourself. So you don't only paint the surface, you really make the whole painting. How did this come about? Is it important for you?  
DCJ: By creating a painting from scratch, it gives me more space and opportunity to modify the size as I want, to use old canvases or textiles, or even wood to create texture. It began in a period where I was looking for other tools of expression, questioning the materials I was working on. I was probably tired of painting. I would start to sew my old leftover-textiles together, hoping that this would be beneficial for a composition later on. I am also quite drawn to the idea of recycling from the streets. I love to find wood in the streets, and to recycle things I find around me. For example, there was a period where I would find discarded books and paint on the cover page. It's almost always a fixed size and it's a great surface to paint on. Basically the idea of creating something which can be valued as something positive, from something that once was seen as trash or discarded.

MJ: Is there something that you want to achieve with your paintings?  
DCJ: Through painting, I want to be able to communicate. To communicate a certain idea or a feeling, a message if you will. By transforming, depicting and adding my imagination, I want my paintings to express a story of such. I want to be able to convey my observations into a painting and share my enjoyment. In short, I receive input and start from my surroundings, and give back with my impressions and imagination.

MJ: As a young artist, which artists have resonated with you and in what way?  
DCJ: There are many artists who have resonated with me over the years and for different reasons. Some reasons could be their attitude, their skills or vision, and others for their identity or enigma, that I've been drawn to. Others I've just admired. Artists from American modernism such as Bob Thompson, to more contemporary artists such as Michael Armitage, Tal R and E.B. Itso, and Barry McGee and his wife Margaret Kilgallen. E.B. Itso I like for his punky, DIY-attitude. Barry McGee resonated in multiple ways, one of the reasons was him being the first artist I knew who was half Asian and half white.

The artists collective Gee's Bend inspired me to start sewing fabrics. Tal R for his colour and playful method of working. Michael Armitage for the way that he is dealing with his heritage. And of course, I like the masters from art history a lot, such as the beauty of Matisse and the pureness of Van Gogh.

MJ: Interesting that you mention Tal R. When I visited your studio for the first time, your work reminded me later that day of the interview Tal R gave to 'Hyperallergic' in 2017. I think that you try to do what Tal R said in this interview. You are not explaining and telling people how to feel or live. You just share, show and point out. What do you think about these thoughts from Tal R?

**Excerpt from 'Beer with a painter Tal R' – Hyperallergic, 2017**  
*What makes a painting beautiful is not about what's in the painting. It is that you feel that somewhere inside the artwork is a pointing finger. You start moving in that direction. You start having a debate. You start fantasizing about the direction where the finger is pointing. If the artwork is doing this, it's a great artwork. In a way, you might call it irresponsible. In most parts of society, you can't have statements just pointing somewhere. You have to come up with an idea, or conclusions, otherwise you're not allowed to raise your voice. In art, it is different. It's the only place that can just point. But the biggest mistake an artist can make is to point the finger and also explain what the finger is pointing at. When you start controlling what the people are feeling, then you are a stupid artist. You should get another job. You should become a politician. Instead, you should create a room to get lost in, a room to debate, a room where you lose names. You had a name when you looked at a painting, but after watching, you forgot the name. You start inventing the world again.*

DCJ: It's great! I like it very much! He is trying to neglect responsibility, and is giving it to the viewer instead. Depending and varying from viewer to viewer, how the viewer sees and interprets it. I really like the thought of just 'sharing' and then people can read it how they want, keeping the painting open for imagination. When I just started painting I loved Tal R so much. His work is for me quite natural, with his use of colours and his playful attitude. And he is Danish. And I think somehow that is also a reason why I also wanted to add these Filipino elements in my own paintings. I see my works as a homage to the Danish and Filipino.

MJ: In your paintings there are these elements and objects that are Danish, Dutch and from the Philippines. You just said your work is a homage to the Danish and Filipino. Are there other reasons why you combine these elements?  
DCJ: I think these combinations started with asking questions of belonging and defining what home is. I was born from a Filipino mother and a Danish father, and then I moved to the Netherlands for studies. I like to combine different elements from the different environments I am in, as a metaphor of 'representing'. To give some of myself into the painting and as an attempt to keep it close to myself.

MJ: Could you elaborate a bit more about the elements in your paintings and why you choose these?  
DCJ: I see the influence of The Philippines in multiple layers. In a more obvious and symbolic way, like the tricycle in 'Journey at night', or the lizard animal in 'Dwellers of the forest'. But also, in an atmospheric spiritual and ritualistic kind of way, with hints and elements from superstitious folk-healing. As an artist, I feel like it is something that I owe myself to be curious about, as it is something that is a part of me. I have a big family there, so I guess painting these Filipino elements is also an attempt for me to connect.

MJ: The figures in your work often hang around a bit, they have a contemplative and relaxed attitude, they read a book, smoke a pipe or have a drink. Why do you choose this?  
DCJ: I like to paint people who are 'vibing'. Figures who seem to be enjoying each other's company and are in a gathering of such. Mainly because of the opportunities of composition you can create. I see it as building an imaginary scene, where you can reference real life and create your own little world. You can add funny dudes or dudettes, walls or nature. Pattern or carpets, chairs or tables. It helps nurture a place for exploration.

MJ: What are your future plans?  
DCJ: In the future, I want to continue painting and develop my practice. I dream of getting my own studio, perhaps a dog as well. I also dream of traveling and to see more of the world. I am curious what would happen to my paintings, if I relocated to a different environment.

– Melchior Jaspers is an art historian and currently works as the art advisor for the Chief Government Architect of The Netherlands.