

Irvin Rodriguez creates fine art paintings, digital art and drawings.



SOMEDAY THIS PAIN WILL BE USEFUL TO YOU



Brothers, digital, 32 x 24"

*Susquehanna Art Museum
presents a solo exhibition
for Irvin Rodriguez focusing
on human experiences.*

BY JOHN O'HERN

*Spots, oil on linen,
40 x 30"*







Two Sides to Every Story, digital, 30 x 30"

The ancients had insights that we now consider to be archetypal, true in the core of our humanity. In his book, *Amores*, written in 16 BCE, the Roman poet Ovid wrote, "Perfer et obdura, dolor hic tibi proderit olim. (Be patient and tough; someday this pain will be useful to you.)"

Irvin Rodriguez has adopted the quote as the title and theme for an exhibition of his work at the Susquehanna Art Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on view through February 20.

He writes, "What seemed like hindrances in my past served as the outlet for my paintings. I only realized later in life how I would benefit from those seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Painting is a way for me to talk about things, no matter how big or small. It allows me to work through the experiences of my life in the most instinctive manner I know."

His parents emigrated from the Dominican Republic and he was born in the Bronx in 1988. "I grew up pretty poor," he says, "but that shaped me and created a hunger or a drive to find any kind of success in what I love doing. Other parents might have sent me down another career path, but mine supported me in my

goal. My upbringing made me the kind of person to persevere. My real love for this work is a borderline obsession—it's a lifetime study. It's different from an athlete who peaks early. I know I'll keep growing better even when I'm 70."

Still in his 30s, Irvin's perseverance has bred success. Working as a character concept artist for the video game



Sketchbook Study 2, graphite on Moleskine paper, 10 x 8"



Crossroads, oil on panel, 24 x 36"

developer Naughty Dog, he is in the advance guard of visual production. In his fine art world, he received the 2019 Donald Jurney Traveling Fellowship, which enabled his travels to Europe to experience in person the art that fuels his obsession with 19th-century paintings. "It was life changing to finally see the works in person, to see their scale," he says.

Irvin records ideas in Moleskine sketchbooks, explaining, "They're a place to create something without consequence, sometimes loose and sometimes more finished ideas that take a couple days of work." Some of the sketchbook pages are in his exhibition including a drawing of his partner, the singer-songwriter and performer, Alexa Marino.

Also included are digital paintings, such as *Brothers*, a moving portrayal of the closeness and distance between brothers.

"It took 10 years to get my digital work to get the feel of my traditional painting," he says. "Painting is informing the digital work. One has caught up with the other. They influence each other and I rest from one medium by working in the other." The computer can be an aid for his traditional painting as well. He can remove and add

elements of the composition and make color studies for the final painting.

"Ideas come from so many places," he explains. A friend from Colombia invited him to Bogota in 2017 to teach painting and drawing. "I was walking around a flea market and saw an old man who was a balloon vendor. He was frail and looked like he could have been swept away by the balloons. That visual stayed in my mind—the joyful, celebratory balloons and the tired, old man."

Balloons have become a recurring motif in his paintings. In *Crossroads*, a Moleskine drawing is developed into a 2-by-3-foot oil painting on panel. The young man appears in a somber void seeming to contemplate the gold balloon—perhaps preparing to go for the gold or wondering why he didn't.

In *Caged Bird*, there are no balloons, just negative space representing, he says, "the gulf in our own minds. We can get trapped in that place, but we can also get past those hurdles and be home free."

He began painting at the age of 4 and by the age of 15 he was working in a shop as an airbrush artist. Irvin graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) with a BFA in illustration in 2010. "I always wanted



Sketchbook Study 12,
graphite on Moleskine
paper, 10 x 8"



Caged Bird, oil on panel, 24 x 24"

to do academic painting," he once told me, "but illustration equaled money." While at FIT, he also studied academic drawing techniques at the Grand Central Atelier.

Whether as a character concept artist, a comic book cover artist or an easel artist, Irvin re-creates and, often, creates an experience. His Moleskine drawings, digital paintings and easel paintings are more than representations of his subjects. He likes to leave the interpretation of his paintings up to the viewer, but the narratives he presents have a universal quality

that are the fruit of his own life experiences in which we can see ourselves.

He longs to create "large-scale sprawling figurative paintings with a meaningful narrative" in the future. In the short term there is a book in the works in which Irvin will explain what his life experiences have meant to him.

Ovid, whose quote provided the title for this exhibition, also wrote, "Qui non est hodie eras minus aptus erit. (He who is not prepared today will be less so tomorrow.)" This is a man who is prepared. ●

IRVIN RODRIGUEZ: SOMEDAY THIS PAIN WILL BE USEFUL TO YOU

When: Through February 20, 2022

Where: Susquehanna Art Museum,
1401 N. 3rd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102

Information: (717) 233-8668

www.susquehannaartmuseum.org