



Queers for a Cause

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Feature Friday with Artist Evelyn Beliveau

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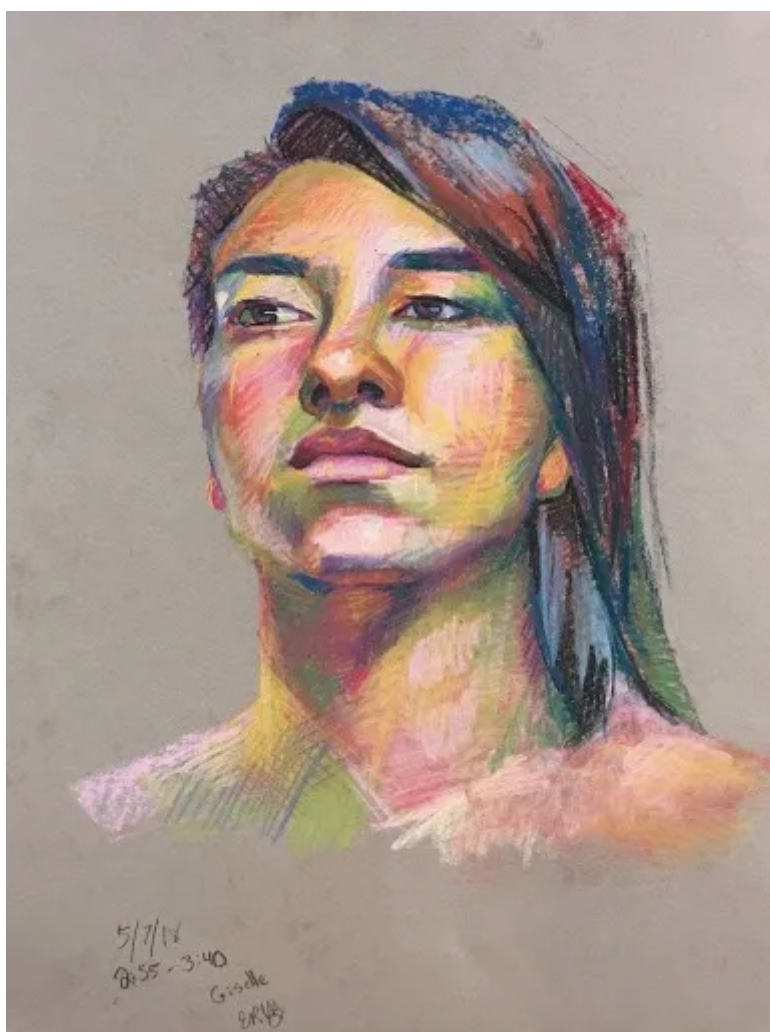


Written by Safire R. Sostre - 6 minute read

When Evelyn Beliveau (she/her) talks about art, her eyes instantly light up. The 23-year-old Vermont-native first started drawing as a kid, and she hasn't stopped since.

"I feel like it goes back a long way," she says about her love of the arts. "I realized in high school that my main interest is around portraits, figures, and images of people. And that's when I started constantly doodling in class. I imagined figures and faces, working from reference images, drawing celebrities. Basically doing everything I could to figure out how people make paintings of faces. I think it was a really important time of exploration."

Her high school art teacher introduced her to oil paint for the first time through an independent study, where she worked long-term on a classical-style oil portrait of a close friend. Once at Bowdoin College in Maine, she studied visual art and learned to work closely with pastel, acrylic paint, and charcoal, among many other mediums. As a student, her art was featured in multiple school exhibitions, including a solo show called *Presence*, where she created a series of pastel portraits of other students.



"Giselle" - pastel on toned paper

“I also did a fellowship over the summer where I was taking those pastel portraits and turning those ideas into a longer term project,” Evelyn says. “And in that, I was working sculpturally along with drawing and painting. I had a studio space on campus, which was huge. I had time and space in quantities that I haven’t had before.” Through that project, which culminated in another solo show and gallery on-campus, she was able to create sculptures from twisted paper, as well as more portraits from life.

Though Evelyn loves working with various types of mediums, her favorite is oil paint. While talking about her all-time favorite medium, she quotes Dutch-American abstract expressionist artist Willem de Kooninghe:

“Flesh is the reason oil paint was invented.”

“I think about that [quote] sometimes,” she says. “I think oil paint has to be at the top for me, especially when I’m thinking about portraying people. There’s just something about the glow of it and the way that the pigments can layer. It’s well-suited to skin, the way light interacts with skin, and the kind of soft touch that you need to have when you’re portraying someone’s features.”

“If you’re working wet-on-wet, you can adjust things, move around, and get really subtle with it while all the paint is still wet and in-play,” she continues. “If you do work in the style of glazing, then there’s also a lot you can do with really subtle layers of colors. I think that the flexibility of oil paint— to be able to do both and have both of those modes— is a really powerful thing.”



"Leah and Anne" - oil on wood panel

After graduating from Bowdoin College last spring, Evelyn worked for three weeks as a teaching artist for [Art Yard Bklyn](https://www.artyardbklyn.com/), an organization that provides art education programs to people of all ages. As a teaching artist in an elementary school, she facilitated art critiques, allowing everyone to compliment and give constructive criticism to each other's work. This provided an opportunity to bring conversations that would normally happen in a college-level art class into a classroom with kids.

"I was actually teaching self-portraiture to, like, third and fifth graders. That was a really valuable opportunity to think back to when I was learning about drawing faces for the first time," she says.

"The cool thing about this program is that in all of those settings that I've interacted with them in, it's really about feeling like we're all on the same footing as artists, no matter the age range."

Evelyn is bisexual and nonbinary. When I ask her about how her queer identities influence her art, she recalls a specific moment at her senior studio art exhibition: “Something that someone said to me when they were seeing my work has kind of stuck with me,” she says. “It was a curator who came to see a show of figure painting— basically, nude portraits of models who came into the studio. And she [the curator] said that it felt like my gaze was not gendered.”

Evelyn isn't sure if the curator knew of her queer identities at the time, but she says it was “really cool” to hear the curator mention that, especially because “so much of art is so steeped” in the white, male, patriarchal gaze.

“Finding a gaze that is neither masculine nor feminine, or a gaze that feels neutral, welcoming, and kind to the people that it's gazing out to or portraying, is something that's really important to me,” she says. “I was so glad to hear that that came through in the work.”

Whether it be drawing musicians during a live performance, or composing portraits of live sitters, it's clear that her art is incredibly engaging. So when the COVID-19 pandemic hit only a few months after she relocated to Brooklyn last fall, she had to learn to adapt. “Painting from life is most exciting to me. Having someone in the room with me and having that exchange of time—that's what I am most excited about. [But] it's hard to have models come and sit for you when there's a pandemic,” she says.



"Saidou" - oil on panel

"The world shrinking down has been pretty difficult," Evelyn continues. "I find my work also changing, kind of going into hibernation for some periods of time and then resurfacing in different moments. I find myself returning to my sketchbook more and focusing on still lifes."

While in quarantine, she's been creating detailed black-and-white graphite drawings of everyday objects, such as pillows and house plants, which she says has been "a meditative, calming, and focusing process for me." She even painted a portrait of one of her roommates, and has worked on a few commissions.

In addition to painting and drawing, Evelyn enjoys spending time outdoors and being in nature; watching TV shows and movies; and reading and writing casually in her free time to "keep my brain flowing with stories." She also enjoys singing and writing music with her family. "It ebbs and flows," she says. "My energy, my creative energy, just wants to come out as paintings, and sometimes it wants to come out as words."

As an artist, Evelyn's goals are straightforward: she wants people to see her work and have a positive experience with it. She hopes her art can open people's eyes to new perspectives and empower them. Most importantly, she simply wants to keep painting and exploring other creative avenues.

“I've worked with live musicians, creating time-based drawings of what they look like when they're in this concentrated mode.... I feel like there's more to be done there,” she says. “And I hope that I will have the chance to do more [painting from life] safely with the pandemic, maybe even some outdoor sittings.”

For queer creatives and artists who are just starting out, here is Evelyn's advice:

1. **Take inspiration wherever you can get it.** “Whether that's from major figures in your life, or from your favorite artists and creators, if you see it, or if you see whatever you see in their work, it is valid for you to take that and make it your own.”
2. **Keep working.** “I'm sure many of them have probably heard this before, but just keep working. Even if you don't know exactly what you're doing, or if you don't know exactly why, just keep creating what feels most exciting to you. And eventually, you'll figure out why you're doing it. But even if you don't, the making is worth it. It is so important to have an outlet or a creative process to feel like, ‘Okay, this is mine, and no one can tell me this is wrong.’”
3. **Move at your own pace.** “It's okay if you don't have the energy [to create] for a little while; it will come back. It's okay to be on a longer cycle, for it to not be at such a breakneck pace, and for the work to kind of simmer and come out when it is ready.”



Evelyn Believeu

Make sure to check out more of Evelyn’s artwork on her [website](#), on Instagram [@evelyn.beliveau](#), and in the latest issue of [NOISE Magazine](#).

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