

The Path to Creation– Interview with Illustrator Tessah Noreen

Emerging artist Tessah Noreen has made herself a growing following over the past years thanks to her captivating, ethereal portraiture. Working in mixed media and a soft color palette, her delicate works play with a sense of whimsical loveliness and explore nature, fantasy, and femininity. Tessah actively participates in exhibitions throughout southern Ontario, with an upcoming exhibition in Buffalo, NY. She has prints being sold all over the world, and has a growing Instagram that currently holds over 8 thousand followers (myself included). Inspired by both her work ethic and art, I chatted with Tessah to find out more about her journey, how she got here, and what her future holds.

How did you get started in the field?

I always wanted to be an artist, but after graduating I worked as a web designer/developer and it took over my life. I wasn't happy. I always turned to art as an outlet and after sharing my creations on social media, I decided to finally pursue my dream with the encouragement of friends and family. It pretty much snowballed from there. Now, I'm a self-employed freelancer and artist, working on being a full-time artist.

What has your artist's journey been like?

Stressful. When you make the decision to be an artist, you have to treat it like a business. Everything changes since it's no longer purely for yourself. How you spend your money and time has to change. Any bad habits you have, you have to be on yourself about. You have to be making work and sell it to afford to make more work, sustain a living, improve your skill, keep up your supplies, etc. I'm a fairly organized person so most things are in order for me. However, financially things can get real tense if I'm not involved in a project, show or making sales on Etsy. I've had some shows where I sell everything and some shows where it's nada. The uncertainty can

be very hard. I am lucky though, I'm in a common law relationship with a very supportive partner.

I started this journey seriously two years ago and each year my profits are higher. I haven't been in the red, yet. Right now, I'm preparing for a solo show and that is pretty much the cherry on this sundae. It's really made me think about all the ways I want to reach people with my craft.

What kind of education, internships or mentorships did you need to pursue in order to realize your work?

This question is tricky for me, because we live with information at our fingertips, I've always researched and tinkered in anything that was interesting to me. From a young age, I was always drawing and building, then I learned to draw on the computer, then I got my hands on Adobe Creative Suite and that changed everything. I always wanted to be better at drawing and painting, traditional or digital, so I was always experimenting with materials and techniques.

I went to the University of Toronto Scarborough because they had just started the New Media program (which was geared to my interest of merging what I loved about art and technology). If I'm being honest, I felt that University taught me how to manage my time, to meet deadlines and properly research my ideas. I already came with a certain skill set and work ethic so I was either helping my colleagues out or trying to find experiences to challenge me, like joining the Department of Student Life. My first real marketing experience. We were responsible for promoting events around the campus through art and advertising. The work I did there helped me get my first job. So I guess if I can answer this question, I think it's more about your willingness to seek out the right information and opportunities to help you grow, whether it's an online course, youtube video or a classroom.

Can you tell me about a mentor and what was an important piece of advice they gave you?

"Try it yourself!" - Neil Buchanan, Art Attack

What do you think are the most important personal qualities to develop to pursue a work practice like yours?

Patience, it takes a long time to create, build your name and portfolio. Resilience, not everyone is going to understand you, your choice to be an artist, or like your work, you have to be ok with that. Determination, knowing what you want and how to get there and then taking small or big steps to make it happen. Dedication, it sounds corny, but it goes hand and hand with all of the above. Having a strong will is great, but you also have to be dedicated to learning and improving. Making sure you set enough time aside for projects that need to get done, but also making sure you set time aside to create just for yourself. That will become really important so you don't burn out.

What is your workspace like? What is your typical day like?

My studio is in my bedroom. If I'm not working there, I'm at one of the cafes in my area doing admin on my laptop or drawing on my note 9 or in my sketchbook. At home, everything in my studio is organized in a container or drawer. My most reached for items, like pencils, liners, sprays, etc are on my desk. All my paper and completed work is stored in a cabinet next it.

I start my morning with breakfast and herbal tea, catch up on freelance emails and social. When I'm done, I make a list of all the items I need to complete for the day in my bullet journal and start checking everything off the list throughout the day. I write down when I start and complete a task, so that I know how long it takes me complete work. I spend a lot of time at my desk, either drawing or freelancing, so I make sure to take 20 minute breaks about every 2 hours to: stretch, clean, walk my dog, meditate or watch an episode of something on Netflix. That way I don't get

fatigued and always come back to my work with fresh eyes. That's the routine that works for me.

How do you make new contacts and promote yourself?

For my art, I promote myself through social using Instagram and Pinterest (with relevant hashtag, thoughtful sharing and comments). I apply for juried and non juried shows in the Toronto area. I've met a lot of people through these type of shows and booked my first solo show this way. I have an Etsy store where I sell prints of my digital work, when my budget allows. I always make sure I have a few business cards on me. I get a lot of commissions and freelance from word of mouth. When people are excited about sharing your work, that is the best type of promotion.

What role has social media played in your career? Do you have any tips on managing it?

Social media has been vital in my artistic career. It's been an amazing resource for sharing my work and seeing how it has changed over the years. It's completely changed how someone can be an "artist". Social media has allowed me to reach people all over the world with a single hashtag. I've sent my work to the UK, Germany, Australia, the US and Canada.

As for tips, I don't use any third party apps or anything like that, but my advice would be if you are using your account to promote your art try to find similar accounts to yours and engage, engage, engage! Leave thoughtful comments. Participate in share/shoutout events, that's probably the fastest way to grow your account. Having a consistent time where you are active helps. Though social has been vital, I would limit how much time you spend on social because you should have goals outside of that space and it's really easy to develop time wasting habits.

What goals do you have for your future? Do you have any dream projects in mind?

Some of my goals: have a solo show in Toronto, ship work for a show to another city or continent, have my work published in Hi-Fructose (my favourite art magazine), sell at a comicon, start a patreon account, and open my own gallery/studio. Mostly, I would love to be able to sustain a living off my art alone, until then it's hustle, hustle, hustle.

Looking back on your younger self, what advice would you give to today's young artists that stems from what you've learned since then?

Set aside some of your money because this dream isn't cheap. Never stop learning and making things. Keep sketchbooks for different things. What you make doesn't have to reflect what you practice, but it helps shape your creations. Keep challenging yourself.

Tessah's work can be found via her website at www.tessahnoreen.com or her instagram handle @tessahnoreen.

On a more personal note, seeing how far Tessah's hard work has taken her has been quite inspirational to me, as a young artist myself. I can't wait to see what the future has in store for her – without a doubt it will be a bright one, given her work ethic and success so far.

