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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Sarah will scour the country for the best and brightest emerging artists on the scene and then interview them about their work. Sarah has a wonderful eye, and I'm sure you will enjoy what she is able to discover. Artists, if you want your work considered, hashtag all your social media posts #tobeannounced #americanartcollector.

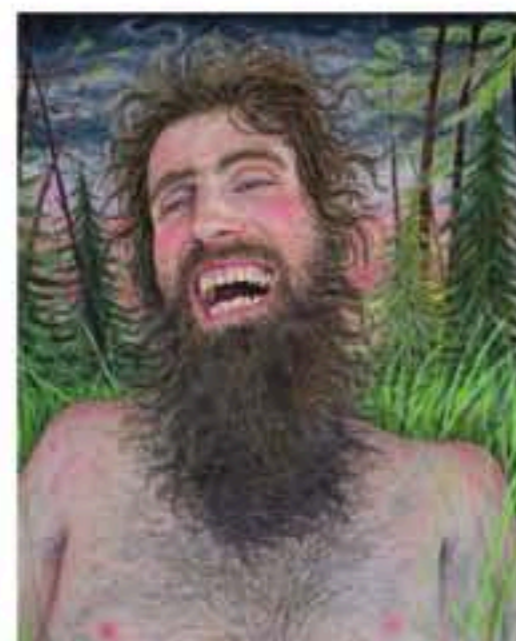
# Interview with Rebecca Morgan

By Sarah Elise Abramson

**B**lemished, unidealized characters exist within naturalistic settings created through the over exaggeration of imperfections and vices. With an unapologetically comical sense of humor and attention to detail, Rebecca Morgan captures the beauty in the banal, ordinary aspects of life as well as some of humanity's most common vices. Morgan's paintings are known to feature people she's known at one time or another, but most commonly, herself. Depicting herself in this manner calls attention to conventional notions of beauty and a look into how we address displaying ourselves. It's all a part of Morgan's story—a collection of moments dreamed up by her in an attempt to embrace her own discomfort as she goes through life; finding herself through her work, while simultaneously allowing others a glance at something quite refreshing.

## Where do you come from?

I was born and raised in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. It is a very rural, conservative small town, high in the mountains in the mid-western part of the state. I have great pride and reverence for the countryside that inspires me, but in a lot of ways, it



is constricting. When I went to graduate school at Pratt Institute, the romanticism of both the urban and the rural situated me liminally in-between and is central to the work that I make. All of the work comes out of this intermediary restlessness; the dichotomy of high and the low are forefront to my aesthetic. Growing up in the country, I had a very romanticized and picturesque childhood and adolescence; we would swim in rivers and lakes and have fires outside

## Where do you live now? How does that affect your work?

I recently completed a year teaching at a university as a visiting artist and now I am back in Clearfield. Every six months I am moving—I am searching for a little more permanence, and I think the heart of the juxtaposition in my work lies in this feeling of restlessness and unsettled sense of belonging. The dynamic of the country contributes: my hometown often serves as a conservative, insular bubble; people are afraid of the unfamiliar and what they don't know. I'm creating portraits inspired by some of the people and things that

frustrate me. The constant shifting of place, which is very important to my identity, is jarring and contributes to the sense of being an outsider, but I realize I have to do that for my trajectory as an artist as my hometown affords me very little resources or opportunities.

## What are you currently working on?

I'm currently making work for my next show at my gallery, Asya Geisberg Gallery in New York, for September 2016. I am making ceramic sculptures, cartoons and small drawings on paper, oil paintings with graphite under drawings on panel and large graphite crosshatched drawings. So far, the images are a mixture of self-portraits and archetypal portraits of bad behavior and scenarios that bridge the gap between my fantasy escape and reality. I want the work to be humorous, relatable, bittersweet, liminal and genuine. The images are of me managing relationships, love, being an artist, bodily discomfort, subject truth, the monotony of daily routine and illustrating the cerebral froth that is generated from navigating all of it.



1 Mountain Man, oil and graphite on panel, 22 x 20"

2 Self-portrait at thirty living in my hometown, post Big Mac meal, graphite and oil on panel, 32 x 22"

3 Eric Party Jug, porcelain, 5 x 5 x 4 1/2"

4 Face Jugs, porcelain, terra-cotta and glaze, dimensions vary.

5 Tourist Bumpkin at Dusk, graphite and oil on panel, 12 x 9"

## Can you talk a little about your self-portraits? What inspires them and what do they mean to communicate?

Ultimately, the work is absolutely about my emotional discomfort—feeling trapped between the urban and the rural, self-loathing, indifference or confidence, romance and lack thereof, or living in my childhood home in my Pennsylvania hometown are all fodder. Illustrating intimate scenes and scenarios of my life lets me reclaim power and ownership of those hard times and weird emotions. Humor is cathartic for me. Embracing the discomfort, flaws and oddity is a way to turn it into lightness.

## The people in your paintings are not the attractive, blemish-free people most commonly portrayed. Can you talk a bit about that?

The face jugs, cartoons and paintings represent a kind of blissful ignorance: they're totally fine with looking so hideous and awful; it's of no consequence to them. In my mind, that empowers them. Though covered in acne, wrinkles and blemishes, their confidence and contentment is the ultimate acceptance of self-love. These characters are blissfully unaware, unruly, wild and untamed. They live off the grid and free, unaffected by anyone or anything's influence, and I'm very attracted to that concept. I am always interested in the anti-hero, the underdog, the unlikely

winner. I root for them and I see a lot of myself in them. There is the expression in art: "paint or make what you know." I use myself as a diaristic model; even when the cartoons or figures are not out rightly me, they represent a veiled self-portrait.

## Where do you pull from? What inspires you?

I deeply love drawing and line. It is absolutely the basis for all my work. It is an almost intangible utter attraction. I love that you can get such variety and character out of line quality; you can say a lot with just a few hatches or economical decisions. My artistic inspirations are mostly figurative but a wide range of representation. A profoundly pivotal moment was when I found my dad's vintage stash of *Mad* magazines in early elementary school—I revered the *Mad* artists, Al Jaffee and Harvey Kurtzman, Don Martin, and Jack Davis. I studied every inch of the books and magazines, which helped me understand humor and situational comedy early on. I loved how they could present brutal satirical truth in a playful, sick or elegant way. I feel very close to Robert Crumb in that he put his diaristic, self-loathing perverted personal imagery, expunging carnal fantasy in lurid intimate accounts coupled with masterful formal execution. In undergrad, I was introduced to John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage and they changed my life.



## What do you love most about creating art?

Not only with my art, but I love how a particular artist can develop such an intense individual style and language that is entirely their own and completely independent from anyone or anything else. I love that it is like seeing someone's brain and essence spewed in front of you.

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Sarah Elise Abramson is a contemporary fine art photographer based in San Pedro, California—a mysterious postindustrial enclave whose offbeat countercultural history and proliferation of unusual sights, sounds and citizens is tailor-made for Abramson's obsession with everyday surrealism. In both her own photography and in her curatorial and editorial approach to exhibition projects and independent publications, her emphasis is on discovering the eccentric beauty in the things most people overlook. Found objects, hidden messages, secrets of the universe that hide in plain sight—throughout her studies at Parsons The New School for Design and Brooks Institute of Photography, and later at LaChapelle Studios, her work has evolved from finding to intuitively creating original daydreams and shared cosmologies.