

Hurry Slowly: Fingerpaintings by Joshua Korenblat

Italo Calvino, a contemporary Italian writer of novellas and short stories, once gave a lecture about a seemingly paradoxical Latin saying that guided his writing, *Festina Lente*, or *Hurry Slowly*. *Hurry Slowly* originated as an illustration in some of the first books printed with movable type, published during the Italian Renaissance by Aldus Manutius, in Venice. Aldus created a maritime logo for the title page of his scholarly books: a fantastical dolphin intertwining with an anchor, symbolizing the working process of printing text, and unwittingly leaving us with a profound motto for idealism. The idealist closes perceived distances between ideas—such as the dolphin, swimmingly swift, and the heavy anchor; the idealist has no problem reconciling opposites. *Hurry Slowly* feels true to two creative spirits, Aldus and Italo, no matter the centuries between them.

Hurry Slowly feels true to my working process today, too. In my art, I connect opposites. When I hurry, I seek the swiftness of gesture drawing, finding the essence of a form. In more traditional mediums, I seek out the sumi brush and paper, which artists in Japan used to connect haiku poems written in ink to visual art, rendered with the same flourishing ease as written words, in a practice called haiga painting. As a writer, the unifying swiftness of haiku poems and haiga paintings appeals to me; after all, words can create a universe of designs in a reader's mind with just a few syllables.

In this show, I sought out an unconventional medium to create art—the iPhone and the app Brushes. I fingerpainted every image here on a credit card-sized screen, immediate and direct observations of patrons at Politics & Prose and Modern Times Coffeehouse (and one more coffee house that will remain unmentioned)—sipping tea, reading books, lost in thoughts. I also created a few cityscape paintings, rendered swiftly anew and simplified on the tiny reflective canvas. Ironically, this smart phone, a miniature computer, allows us to return to a more tactile realm, directing any digital reading experience with the touch of a finger.

I fingerpaint from direct observation, simplifying our bustling microcosmos, constrained within the limits of the canvas space but energized by an unbounded palette of digital color. I've enlarged and printed each image from my phone into formats typically reserved for traditional media. When I paint a person, I stop painting when that person leaves, so you can see how fleeting, or how lengthy, my communal experience was with the subject of each fingerpainting. Often, we distract ourselves from our surroundings by delving into smart phones. When I fingerpaint, most people do not realize that I am creating a painting right before them, creating a dynamic between artist and subject that seems impossible with more traditional media, which often raises the self-consciousness of all parties.

Yet for all the swiftness of these fingerpaintings, they are quite slow to make, compared to taking a photograph. Why paint a portrait or landscape when a photograph can more deftly record an encounter? For me, the answer goes back to the essential nature of sumi brush painting, and the art of caricature, which seeks to characterize a subject through exaggeration and a focus on an essential spirit. When I paint a patron of Politics & Prose, I ask myself, what can we glimpse of this person's interior world in public view? What is the difference between characterizing by rendering a likeness, and the true character of a subject, which most clearly reveals itself not in quotidian moments, captured here, but in situations that require significant decisions? I believe that you can read expression in the face, experience in weathered features, and personality in style choices, such as clothes. Faces reveal stories in a natural way, just as stories appear in eroded rocks and the rings of a tree trunk. I am intrigued by the inferred tension of the moment: what happened in this person's life before our ordinary, even forgettable encounter, and what might happen after? How does this tension inform the image? Six basic expressions color our faces: sadness, anger, joy, fear, disgust, and surprise. Yet only subtle mixtures of these emotions typically appear in public spaces. The stifled smile seems most evident in everyday conversation, and you see a few of these smiles on these walls.

Haiku poets seek immediacy. A sketch conveys more life than a finished work of art. That's why I call this work *haiku fingerpainting*. Though each painting occurred in an urgent moment, slowness reveals itself in the big picture, ever-changing, comprised of so many small attempts to tell essential stories through pictures. The haiku poet Basho wrote a lyrical epic of life as he knew it, in thousands of brief poems. Despite grim health, his last poem suggests more on the horizon, "Sick on a journey/ my dreams wander/ the withered fields." Like life, art exists in the elusive moment, and every ending invites the beginning of another story.