

## **"No one notable was doing the norm." Talking Art with Jamie Sanin**

Jamie Sanin and I chat over coffee on a misty January afternoon, raising our voices over the noise of grinding espresso beans and chatting customers. We are visiting New Paltz, New York, a small town at the Eastern edge of the Catskill region, and the place where Jamie earned her undergraduate degree in Art Education.

With experience in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts, she has involved herself in local communities, standing strongly by the notion that art can effect positive social change. When she's not engaged in her diverse body of work, she can be found instructing classes with Vine Van Gogh, co-managing young actors and costume designers at Washingtonville High School, and supporting local poets and artists at open mics throughout the Hudson Valley.

As our conversation carries us over to the art studios of SUNY New Paltz, Jamie offers sincere insight to her process, her various points of inspiration, and the role of today's young artists.



Check out some of Jamie's work on her Facebook here, as well as on her website here.

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**To begin, we're using your portrait of Shamir Bailey for the first issue of our magazine.  
Could you talk a bit about that piece?**

I wanted to start painting 'Young Bosses' – talented, inspiring people who are really young, like Malala. Shamir is dope – he's winning all kinds of 'Album of the Year' awards with *Ratchet* and he's only 21. He's really good and he brings the fun times.

**How often are you drawing inspiration from outside of art? What do you look for?**

I don't necessarily look for anything. I just look, and if stuff jumps out, if it's notable, then I'm like "Ooh, there's a reason why that's jumping out."

For example, my dad is moving things around our house, and there's all these different colored cassette tapes. Some were see-through. They were looking right and I was like "I'm about to paint some cassette tapes."

**What are some healthy habits for artists to take on every day to stay productive or to keep improving their work?**

It's different for everyone, I'm sure. For me: staying current – checking out different stuff, networking, in the sense of going around and seeing what other artists are up to. Sketching is important – I try to keep a little sketchbook on me at all times. But recently, a lot of my sketching has been writing, not drawing, and I think that's really important too. Recently, there's been more writing than drawing.



**Do you think that a young artist who manages and instructs herself is capable of anything different from an artist who is being supervised by a faculty?**

Maybe there's a box, sometimes, that faculty will put young artists in. I know at my school, a lot of my professors were trying to put me into a box, telling me to go into a direction. It was always the same direction, the same box, and I wasn't feeling it. So a lot of my professors didn't like my work at all.

But then I graduated, and I was doing it more for me, and I started meeting people who could appreciate it for what it was. That's not to say "I only want to know people who like what I do." It's not that, but to me, you've got to take art for what it is. You can have an opinion, but it's not always going to be the same.

**Do you think there has to be some instructional basis for art before you branch off on your own?**

It's helpful. Making art and putting it out there can make you feel vulnerable, and so having a mentor or teacher early on to guide you on what you're doing good, or what you're doing bad, is helpful.

**It might even be easier to handle a range of styles and opinions if you're not being informed by a faculty or a group that you're strictly a part of.**

It's definitely helpful, though, to have the input of other artists. And I do really miss having that network of peers to give me little tips, or to see what they're doing to get inspired. A lot of the faculty, though, were artists and not great teachers. The teacher in me was like "Don't tell me what to do! I'm doing this for a reason!"

**You're out of college for a couple years now, so what do you do keep a network?**

A lot of my friends are into art, even if they aren't personally a visual artist. They still get creative, and I get input from them. Staying inspired, I think, is important. I try to go to galleries and shows to stay inspired.



**How often do you work in different mediums?**

I was working with oils for a long time. Oil is awesome, but it also takes the longest to dry, because of the way I paint. I like to create a lot of physical texture on my paintings, and doing that with oil takes a long time to dry. I've been using Acrylic more recently so I can create that texture, but not have it be wet for so long.

**You mentioned to me once that you go through different periods or styles. What causes your transitions?**

I had a series that I started working on at the end of college, called 'Dynamic', and at the time, I was more attracted to teaching community art, rather than teaching in a classroom. There's a lot

of ways you can teach art at a YMCA or a Boys and Girls Club, and I think I was really attracted to that kind of environment, so I think that urban influence is really apparent in that series. And I think that, with Shamir, it was sort of a transitional painting. [Shamir's portrait bridges the gap between 'Dynamic' and 'Young Bosses'].

I'm interested in a lot of stuff. I try to keep up with political debates. One of my really good friends, Phil, is into science. My friend José is really into performing arts.

There are some things that I'm not going to know – but I try to know. I ask my friends a lot of questions to know what's up in their respective fields.

**Do you consider that part of your process, putting yourself out there? What is your process when you're making a painting?**

It's hard to track the process, but an important step is, what I call, the "step-back". You work on something, then you take a step away. And not just the triple-chin lean-back. Physically get away from the painting, then look at it from afar, or sleep on it, and I think that helps you to not get caught up in the little moments. To see it as a whole.

It's something that's also applicable to life. You're wondering, a little stuck? Take a step back, maybe for an hour, maybe for a year, and when you return, your perspective is going to be clearer!



**For someone who is trying to get into painting, but doesn't know how, what are some of the best first steps they should take?**

Play! *Play*. I think people take art so seriously. I think I started calling myself an “artist” and feeling good about it when I stopped trying to be an artist, I guess. Everybody thinks art needs to be this certain thing because it’s “good” or “bad”, but it’s so different for everyone. There’s no one way to do it.

When people say “I’m not good” – what defines good? What is good? There are so many different styles – just play, let your guard down, and see what happens. Maybe you’ll love it – that’s nice – maybe you won’t love it, and then you’ll know what you don’t like!

No one notable was doing the norm, in any discipline. You’ve got to switch it up. It’s still valid, even if it isn’t the same.

In the paint classes I teach, so many people are like “Oh, I’m so bad”, because their work isn’t turning out exactly the same as what I’m painting. But you don’t want it to turn out exactly the same! It’s like your handwriting, everybody is different, but that doesn’t mean it’s bad.

**You teach paint and sip classes, so you probably get a lot of people who have never painted before, or are very nervous to start. How do you guide them along or get them to guide themselves?**

I try to keep the vibe really chill and fun. Keep validating everybody, encourage them that everybody needs to start somewhere. These people could have went to a movie, but instead they're trying to make art. And if you hate it, now you know how to hold a brush and you can always just paint over it or something!

**Is art something that you should be enjoying? Something you should be having fun with?**

That's what it is for me. I've always been a maker, I've always been making stuff. I try to play, which is why I love to put texture into my paintings. But it's different for everyone, as an artist, or as a viewer. There's no one answer – it doesn't have to be one thing, but I think that's kind of what makes it great.