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Inside the New York City Art World

by Eliza T. Pendergast '24, Dani Bernstein '24 | April 11, 2023 | Connections and Careers

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Rob Knight's junior seminar art students visit an exhibit by the artist Xiyadie at The Drawing Center in New York.
Photo: Rob Knight

Eliza Pendergast '24 and Dani Bernstein '24 were among art concentrators who visited artist studios in New York City last week. Read their impressions of the trip.

Ten members of Hamilton's Junior Seminar art class visited New York City last week with Professor Rob Knight. Junior Seminar is a rite of passage for art concentrators to come together as a class and begin independently developing their artistic practices in a communal environment. Our three-day NYC adventure exposed us to the real-life art world. We visited several galleries, met with artists in their studios, and even attended a group art show that included a piece by Charlie Guterman '22.

Five professional artists welcomed us into their studio spaces to chat with us about their processes. We visited an incredibly diverse group of artists, from an emerging sculptor with a cramped and poorly ventilated home studio space to a painter with eight studio assistants selling paintings for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Each artist ran their studio and introduced us to their process in different ways. Some were confident and steadfast in their practices, while others were still developing their engagement with the art world.

The artists spoke of their research. For some, the research of the concept, material, and historical context before creating is the majority of their creative process. Some research processes were more structured and informed than others. This range of practices exposed us to the fact that there are as many ways to be an artist as there are ways to practice art. Each studio, without fail, had a collection of books and reference materials. It was incredibly helpful to begin observing both the processes we do and do not want to include in our current and future practices.

Art is made, displayed, and received in infinite ways. After the studio visits, I realized that art on display in galleries and museums is almost impossible to fully appreciate outside of the context in which it was created. When we saw mixed-media painter Derek Fordjour's work in his studio, we heard the music on his speakers and saw the printed reference photos and his assistants pasting hundreds of paper circles. He spoke of his inspirations, and I saw and understood his canvases differently than I had before. It was also cool to see that there are numerous ways to display and experience artwork. The museum/gallery/high art space is still in existence but is not the only option. Art seems to be pushing the boundaries of both museum and canvas in contemporary practice.

The variety of studios was inspiring. Sculptor and performance artist William Lamson has huge rock slabs in his Brooklyn garage-turned-woodshop. Fordjour has a miniature factory organized to support

his practice, including a lounge area worthy of *Architectural Digest*. Photographer Hannah Whitaker creates her work in a high-ceilinged workspace with shelves of props, boxes of backgrounds, endless printed material, and prayers from the nearby mosque drifting in through the windows.

Each of the artists was with their quirks: Whitaker had a copy of Karl Marx's *Capital* in the hallway bathroom, Fordjour greeted us barefoot, and sculptor Dena Paige Fischer had a box labeled "skulls and bones" on a top shelf. Fischer also shared that she used the ashes of her deceased dog in his memorial piece.

Where else can you share fears of AI, inquire about personal finances, and debate the best type of glue? We were exhausted coming off the weekend but also newly inspired and ready to return to the studio and continue making work. One of our favorite takeaways from the weekend was strengthening our relationships with each other as we navigate how to create a support structure in and beyond the studio and classroom.



Students on the spring 2023 studio tour enter the subway, off to meet their next artist.



Anna Arzeno '25 talks with artist Will Lamson, who creates public art installations and performance art.



Work displayed in sculptor Dena Paige Fischer's studio.



PPOW Gallery associate director Ella Blanchon speaks to students about the work of Shellyne Rodriguez.





Students visit photographer Hannah Whitaker's studio.



Bethany Fell '24 tries on one of artist Dena Paige Fischer's wearable sculptures.



Students with mixed media artist and sculptor Derek Fordjour.



Students listen to photographer Hannah Whitaker talk about her work.

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