

# THE COMEDY GAZELLE



# ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey annihilate a sold out Laugh Factory. *Why haven't I heard of her before?*

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it can pass you by.

That's why I started The Comedy Gazelle – to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to share knowledge that can hopefully make the scene that much stronger. It was also the pandemic and I had shit else to do.

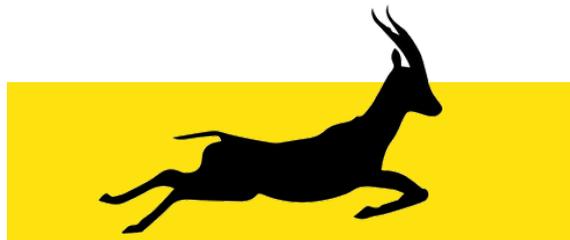
Thanks for your support!

– Jerry

---

**INTERVIEW: KYLE KINANE, 3**

**ART: JOSEPH MANDEL, 10**



## INTERVIEW: KYLE KINANE

*Fresh off the release of his latest special, **Shocks & Struts**, I sat down with Kyle Kinane (@kylekinane) to discuss his 20 minute closer, storytelling tricks, his time as a Chicago open micer, advice from Daniel Tosh, and more. If you haven't seen the hour, go do it!*

**The first special I saw of yours was *Whiskey Icarus*, and you just released another hour. How do you feel you've grown as a comic since that first special?**

I think it's been said over and over again, and the same applies to music: you have your whole life to record your first album; you just have another year and a half to record the second. I did an album in 2010, then *Whiskey Icarus* came out in 2012. I'd say part of me is not surprised at all that I'm still doing it. This is the thing I wanted to do since I was a child: be a standup. Not divert it, not use it as a stepping stone to other jobs in entertainment. I wanted to be a standup comic. Maybe the shows got a little bit bigger. Material-wise? I have no idea. I hope I've matured. I like when you can trace a comic's growth as a human being. I still have jokes or stories about drinking or getting into too much trouble, but I'd hate for my identity to be the same as it was when I was 35 and that was recorded, you know? I hope it's perceived as growth.

**Did you anticipate getting this far in your career?**

I grew up watching bands and I saw what bands did. Some of them maybe never got to the massive, superstar level, but if they were still happy doing it and people were showing up to see them play, then they were gonna keep doing it. That's kind of how I thought standup was gonna be. There's so many tiers of success within standup. "Oh my god, you never had a Netflix special," or "you're not playing this size of venue." I can get in my head about that sometimes, for sure, but I'm not for everybody. "Oh, I'm not playing the United Center with my comedy?" No shit. I'm not doing comedy that appeals to that many people in that kind of way. If I thought I was doing the most mainstream comedy and I wasn't achieving success because of it, that'd be a different kind of frustration. I am gonna talk about exactly the things I want to talk about, I will pivot my viewpoints based on information and emotional changes in my life, and if people are with me, cool, and if not, whatever. I still keep my lights on telling jokes. Fortunately, I was not raised incredibly materialistic,



and I don't have kids, so I don't have a lot of extraneous expenses. So I can keep things streamlined and do comedy how I see fit.

**That's the dream: make a living and do it how you want.**

I think sometimes people are beholden to their fanbase. You get popular based off a certain type of act, and then people get fearful that if they change that act, then they'll lose that fan base. I've always said I want loyalty; I don't want numbers. I want people that are with me because they want to see me change and have different ideas about things, not because "Oh, he's got that catchphrase we all like," or some shit like that.

**You started in '99. How has 24 years of standup has affected you as a person?**

I'm not name brand famous or anything, but I'm still doing exactly what I wanted to do how I wanna do it for a living, and I feel like just for that I somehow won. I got the thing. I'm doing the thing I always wanted to do. I don't take that for granted, ever, which is why I keep working really hard at it. Cause it's not guaranteed. Tastes change. Comedy is

for people that are in their 20s and 30s; well, I'm in my mid 40s, so how do I stay at this level or hopefully get a little bit bigger of an audience that will keep coming to standup shows for as long as I'm doing standup shows? You have to still look at things like an adult, like, "Oh, I need the retirement plan and still need these things." Other than that, nothing's aged me. I still forget that I'm 46. My girlfriend's out of town and I'm just playing electric guitar and fixing my bicycles and fixing my remote-control cars. It's the middle of a Thursday where people are at work, so that's pretty successful I think.

**I feel like people get into standup for different reasons. Some comics like making people laugh, for others it's self-exploration, partying, money. What's been your reason for doing standup, and has that changed as you've progressed in your career?**

I didn't have a lot of passions as a youth. I always liked watching standup because it was always fascinating to me, "Oh, it's one guy or gal." They're not in a band, they didn't have to learn an instrument, they're not in a play, they're not in a TV show; they're just standing up there talking and they're on the Tonight Show? I'm like, "That's it!" That's just one person doing their thing. That was always appealing to me. Also, smart ass, class clown kind of kid. That's where I got my validation, from making other people laugh. I think if I'm really true to myself, I always wanted to be famous for something, and I didn't know why. You're youthful and you've got misguided ideas when you're young, and then I got into standup — I still wanted to be good at it; I didn't wanna just be famous — I was just like, "I don't have interests or skills." I had no interests as far as what a career might be in my life, and I had no skills that were gonna dictate what that career might be. "Oh, you're good at math, you could get into this." I didn't have either of those things, so it was pretty freeing to just be like, "Oh, I guess I'll just fuck off and figure it out." I was reading a thing about comedy open mics, I'm like, "Well, why don't you stop being a pussy and go do it?" And as soon as I started doing that, I was like, "Oh, this is what I'm gonna do, regardless of if there's fame or money attached to it. I'm gonna do this thing because I enjoy this form of self-expression and figuring out how to be original." I didn't want cheap laughs; I wanted laughs that were honest and like, "Oh, nobody's thought of that idea before." That was the rewarding part of standup. If one thing works, great, now I gotta write another one.

**I want to ask you about the special, specifically your closer, that whole Garrett bit. That's a 20-minute-long story. How do you work out something like that?**

I headline on the road, so I get an hour plus every night. I'm not very sharp with writing short jokes anymore, which is a skill I need to retain. "Here's a funny story and here's a couple details about it." You start talking about it. It might be exaggerated at parts, but never false. With a big fish story, the details get a little more rich, but that's what a story is. There's no setup-punchline, but every detail has something funny to it — I hope. It's just storytelling. Storytelling is still a thing. You give somebody like me, who's real long in the tooth already, an hour? Well, I'm not gonna write a joke that's 30 seconds; I'm gonna write something that's five minutes, then it's eight minutes, then it's 12 minutes, and then it's 20 minutes. The more I tell it, the more it's like, "Oh, here's this funny detail" or, "Oh, I didn't think people would laugh at this part as much as they did, so I'll talk about this thing more."

**How do you balance adding versus cutting within a story? If I have a great concept, I'll add, but sometimes I'll add too much and take the air out of it.**

Sometimes an important part of comedy is being a good listener and listening to the audience. Like, "Oh, that story is just too long. I like all these details, but they don't." I always add. I'll admit, though, I'm greedy about it. If they're still following me, then I'll keep adding shit. When you got an hour to fill, you're like, "Alright we can beef up this bit." If people are laughing, keep doing it. If there's still meat on the bone, go for it.

**If I'm telling the same story every night, after a while I get sick of it. How do you stay excited about a long bit like that?**

I don't. You figure out new ways to tell it a little bit over time, but eventually it's

like, "Alright, I gotta retire this cause I know I'm starting to phone it in." I was talking to a theater actor once – think of a Broadway run and how many shows they do, and they gotta say it exactly the same. I was asking the guy how he mentally prepares for it and he was like, "Well, if I had a bad day, the character had a bad day. I still gotta say the words, but they're coming from a guy that had a bad day." I get real sick of my own shit. I don't like myself enough to say the same thing over and over again.

**Say you have a funny story, it gets laughs at the beginning and along the way, but there's no real ending. What do you do when there's no good way to bring it home?**

Well, like the story on the special, I just tried to tie a lesson in. It's sloppy, at least I feel it's a sloppy way to wrap that story up, but I didn't wanna lie. That's how the story ends. He got me out and everything was cool. That's not a hilarious end, so I turned it inward and tried to make it a lesson. You can always go higher concept and try to make it emotional. That's just the old college bullshit: write an introduction, fill the middle with whatever bullshit you want, then write a conclusion that restates the introduction. That's just easy trickery to get someone to think there's a theme to the story. It can still be true, but that's what it is. Like, "Oh, here's a story about redemption," then you tell the story you were gonna say anyway, then you make up something at the end that sounds like redemption. That also helps you write the story differently too, because you're like, "I said this is what the story is gonna be about; I'm gonna find different layers to the story." For that story, I realized I was just making fun of that guy, but all he did was help me and I'm shitting all over him the whole time. I'm like, "Wait a minute, he was just a nice guy. I just spent 15 minutes mocking him; I need to turn this back on myself because that wasn't a nice thing I did."

**Did you go further with the insults because you are coming back around in the end?**

No, I had a separate bit about how it's weird that I'm judgmental because I always have pee in my pants. That was just its own bit. Then I was like, "Well, wait, I'm being judgmental on this bit, here's this other bit about being judgmental; they can be married together." Grouping of internal thoughts sometimes is the trick to standup, of like, "Well, here's several bits of the same theme, let's make them work together."



**Did you have other bits you pulled into that?**

I think that one was just – you know, it was a mushroom desert trip. Which, again, I'm not trying to be like, "Fuckin drug stories!" I was just mentioning that's what I was doing out there, but that the music was bad. Then that turned into a big old thing about jam bands, which I just fucking hate jam bands. "Here's a way to make that bit a part of the story." You just add an ornament to the Christmas tree. That whole AAA thing, that's just what happened. I think if you're a comedian, that's the fun, challenging part, is knowing you have a situation. You're like, "Alright, something's gonna be funny, so write down these details." They might not be funny, but they're details that'll turn into something. My cat just died two weeks ago. I was writing jokes about that while crying about it, cause I'm like, "Eventually these are gonna be bits, so start scribbling stuff."

**Comedy's a good way of processing some of that stuff. Like no matter what terrible thing happens, at least some good will come of it.**

Yeah, for better or worse, that's how I process everything in my life now: a joke comes up first. Knowing whether or not you should speak that joke when it comes to you, that's the maturity I think. I keep a lot of stuff to myself in different situations. Not everybody thinks comedy is healing, you know?

**I heard you say on a podcast that nowadays you have the idea and the experience, and then you figure out what the joke is, versus when you were younger you had the punchline. How do you like that style now, of brewing on an idea and seeing where it takes you?**

I mean, it's more frustrating to write. I think some of that comes from — I just don't wanna be a comedian all the time. I don't want my brain to be like that; that's exhausting. I want to have a fulfilling existence with a range of emotions, and then we can write the jokes. Being on all the time just sucks. It sucks to be on all the time; it sucks to be around somebody who's on all the time. I look back at times when I was that comic. There's some people where you're like, "Where should we go eat?" [and they're like], "Eating's such a weird concept! It turns into poop!" I'm like, "Shut the fuck up man and pick a restaurant! I don't need this shit right now! I can't do this."

**You gotta be a normal person too.**

Yeah, I think it makes the comedy a little more substantial if you go through the human experience and write the jokes from that place, as opposed to just taking the surface level knee jerk reactions that you have. Like, "Oh, look at this thing, it was stupid." Well, why did you think it's stupid? Maybe you gotta look inward: "Oh, the things that I think are stupid are because I don't understand them and really the onus is on me to be more understanding and not so judgmental." That kind of stuff. Self-inflicted therapy. It's not the easiest, but I think the bits are better.

**So, personally, if I have an idea that I know will be a great bit, but I can't figure it out, my brain's always on, like, "What if this is it? What if this is it?" and I can't get it out of my head. Do you have that, or are you like, "When it comes to me, it comes to me?"**

Bits that don't work? Yeah man, all the time. I lay awake with 'em. I lay awake thinking about 'em. Sometimes I know why it's not working, like, "Oh, I'm trying to be edgy instead of trying to be funny." Is that the reward I want? I'm like, "I wonder why this doesn't work," and my girlfriend's like, "Oh, because you're trying to prove a point in your bit, but you're forgetting to have fun while you're doing it." And I was like, "Oh yeah, that does change the tone," when a comedian's just proud of themselves rather than enjoying the humorous part of things. And with some other stuff, it's because you tried doing it reverse engineer: "Lemme take a horrible thought and try to work backwards to see if I can make people laugh at this horrible thought." Sometimes that

just doesn't work because the thing you're saying is still horrible. That's like the Holocaust joke that happened in the special. I was proud of that one. I was like, "No, this works, this is a good joke." I'll say that; I was proud of that.

**I love that joke. But you can tell there was this energy shift in the room. How do you navigate something that might make the audience feel uncomfortable?**

Well, that one I know what I'm doing. There's occasions where I'll do that and I know it's a good joke, and people will refuse to laugh at it based on principle. I'm like, "Alright." There's very few bits that I'll go full public defender and stand up for the joke, but that's one of them. I know this isn't offensive to anybody and it's a good joke, so if you don't like it, tough shit; I'm still doing the joke. There's other times where I'm like, "Oh, I'm just trying to take a very unpopular concept and be cheeky about it."

**You started in Chicago, where there's a lot of 10-minute spots. There's also a lot of comics who, over time, become trapped in their tight 10-20. What kind of advice do you have for those people to avoid getting stuck?**

You work the road where people give you more time, or you be alright with failing. At open mics, you want a laugh to feel good about yourself, or you might be fine tuning a joke, but I've seen people at open mics doing the same set for years. It's like, "You're just beating off at this point." Again, it's an open mic, it's not my place to tell you what you can or can't do with it. Some people just need that; it's a chance to hang out with their buddies at a bar and it's like a game of pool: they know

**"SOMETIMES I KNOW WHY IT'S NOT WORKING, LIKE, "OH, I'M TRYING TO BE EDGY INSTEAD OF TRYING TO BE FUNNY." IS THAT THE REWARD I WANT?"**

they suck at pool, but they like playing with their friends. They know they're not great at comedy, but they're gonna do this five minutes and feel good about themselves and have drinks with their pals. But I don't want the adulation, I like the challenge of like, "Can I still write a new joke? Can I write a new joke after that joke?" So if you wanna get more time, you can start working the road. There's dudes here in Oregon that are starting shows, cause then they can give themselves as much time as they want. But they'll put together good shows, cause they know they want to get other comics on there, and they're making their own scene.

### **What were you like when you were at the open mic level in Chicago?**

When I started, I had my couple of bangers that I would throw out there. I was very Hedberg influenced, so I had a lot of one-liners. Also, I couldn't stop writing. I loved it so much that I just kept writing and writing and writing. I'd go up maybe once a week. I didn't live in the city; I lived out in the burbs and had a day job, a couple jobs. I'd get out once a week, once every two weeks. I just kept trying to write shit. All the comics I liked were always coming up with new stuff.

### **How did you make the most of your stage time?**

It took me a long time to get my career started because I was pretty drunk. There was nothing specific. There was Lion's Den; Monday night would have a crowd of 100-some people and I wanted to do good there. "It's an open mic, I still want to do good, so here's a couple bangers and here's a new joke." Zanies really didn't give a shit about putting up locals, so nobody was vying for clubs. Nobody was trying to be famous; they just wanted to be good to the other comics, so you just kept trying to impress other comics. Not play to the back of the room, but still be good at it, still be respected. Not just jerking off.

### **How do you feel like coming up in the Chicago scene influenced your comedy?**

Nobody was famous. Everybody was ugly. Nobody was trying to be famous, they just wanted to be good at it, so that's what was important: being good at standup in accordance to the other people you thought were good too. You can go up in front of audiences and pull hacky shit and have a great set, but the guys that were in the know knew like, "No, I wanna be good based on originality." You get the people who do the bar shows, "Who's fucking out here!" They do all that stuff and they couldn't see why they were still not good at comedy - listen to me being little Judge Judy over what good is - but being a clown for drunks at a snowmobile bar in Antioch is different than trying to put original ideas out there that sometimes might get your ass kicked at a snowmobile bar in Antioch. I've been both of those guys by the way; I've been both people in that story.

### **What kind of advice would you have for a comic that wants pure standup to be their career? How do they break out and do what you're doing?**

Man, I've always said you've gotta love it enough that you'll do it for free forever. That's the approach you have to have. Hopefully it's not for free and you get a break here and there, but you have to have an unconditional love for standup and for all the shitty parts of it. Also, man, if you're not bothered by bad shows, I think you're a sociopath. I don't trust people that aren't bothered by bad sets. I don't trust them as human beings.

### **How do you deal with bad sets? I know it's not always gonna be great, but then I'm like, "Man that fucking sucked. I'm better than that."**

Yeah, I get real bummed out, man. I get pissed off. But then that just makes me go, "Alright, now you gotta go wash off the stink." It makes me work harder. "What went wrong? Okay, fix that next time." On Saturday - I didn't have a bad set - but I set the bar very high for myself and I didn't reach that bar. I'm like, "Alright, well, you were tired, you were unenthusiastic, you

coulda changed that, you coulda refreshed yourself on your material better," cause I was kinda winging it. Like, "Alright, let's analyze why things didn't go well."

**You mentioned you were big on writing when you were starting. Are you still writing consistently?**

I don't sit down and write. I don't sit down and dedicate part of my day to writing jokes. It has to come from, "Oh, I think there is something there." I'll make a note of it, and if I make a note of it, I'm usually looking through my other notes and I might add something to it and I'll slowly get in the space. But I usually write on stage. It's usually, "Here's the concept, here's point A, here's point B, let's see what we get into in between those areas that I think is funny." And if it works, then you jot those down after the show. But I can't just sit and be like, "Today we're gonna write a joke about car dealerships." It's not my style of comedy. I see those guys, observational comics, they're funny, some of it's real funny, but it's not my style. I gravitate towards stuff that's more personal. Not saying the other guys aren't funny. Sometimes if something's silly, I'll put an observational detail out there.

**Yeah, you've got all these specific descriptions and analogies. You're just riffing that on stage, then you add it to the act?**

An analogy might be written down, but details? That's just creative writing shit to get people involved, like, "I walked into the room." Okay, well, what color was the room? What temperature was the room? Was there music playing? What were the sounds in the room? You make jokes out of those details, cool, you just added four minutes to "I walked into a room." That's not even a story; that's not even the joke yet. If you read something, that's what good writing is: "Oh, I feel like I'm there." I've just taken that and put it into comedy. That's all it is.

**I heard you say that your philosophy starting out was that you wanted to be asked to do shows; you didn't believe in hustling and asking to get put up. Can you talk about that a little bit?**

If you're all hat no cattle, sometimes that's pretty obvious. "Why'd so and so get on the show?" Well, because they asked. But then, they eat shit on that show, and they're not gonna get asked to do that show again. Some people have all hustle, some people have all talent, some people have a healthy mix of both. But the people that have all hustle will get more out of this world than the people that have talent and just expect to be recognized for it. It's not that I expected to be



recognized for anything. I would go to shows cause I wanted to watch the show, and I'd just let people know, like, "Hey, if you have a drop out I'm here." That's it. "I'm still here to watch the show and support," not be a dick, not stand in the back and talk. That was kind of my quality control. I didn't bother somebody to put me on a show; they wanted me there. "Okay I've earned this." That was a point of pride for me, knowing that I earned the things I got and didn't just kiss ass. I wasn't slippery about it.

**Nowadays, I feel like there's a lot more noise. There's tons of comics, people putting out reels, podcasts, YouTube videos. Do you still feel like you can take that wait to be asked kind of approach?**

No, like I said, there's still a healthy mix. But believe in the product that you're selling. There's a difference between just asking because you want something and asking because you know you have a commodity. Get your chops. People a year in wondering why they're not headlining spots are clueless.

**Looking back, do you wish there was anything you had done differently in your career?**

Yeah, I could've turned down the partying aspect a little bit and turned up the focus. Part of it was I did enjoy

the social aspect, and I still do. Those are my friends and my friends are doing stuff that makes me laugh, and that's good for you. Why wouldn't you be very attracted to hanging out in bars and seeing people that wanna make you laugh? That makes you feel good. But I could've been on the ball a lot more; I lacked focus and determination my whole life. I'm trying to be better about it now, but now that translates into "you should be making reels and doing all this stuff." Well, I hate that fucking stuff. But I have a management company that cuts all my stuff up and puts it out there, so I'm okay with parting with 10% of my income for it. I hate it. I pay somebody else to hustle.

### **What's the best advice you've gotten in your career? Anything still stick with you?**

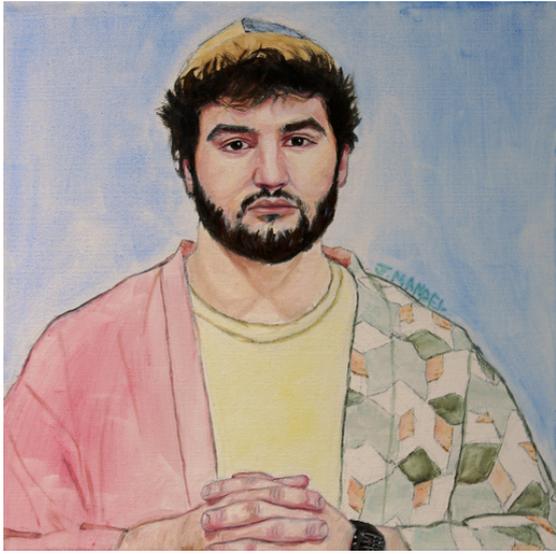
Anybody that I've respected understands that this is all so uniquely personal and these paths are all different, so advice that might apply to one person doesn't apply to somebody else. When I was opening for Daniel Tosh, probably the same time Whisky Icarus came out, he just told me, "None of these numbers are real. These agents tell you, 'Oh, you have to pay 10%, 15%.' None of this is real. It's not a real business, remember that. All these people, they're not real. They can do things for you, but these are arbitrary numbers. These aren't legal numbers, these aren't tax rates, so ask them what they're gonna do for this much." Just his approach to not being intimidated by the business side. Now, granted, he was headlining theaters when I was opening for him, so he gets to be that way. But see it for what it is; you're a clown, other people wanna make money off you being a clown. It was a very candid moment from what people know publicly about Daniel Tosh. Like, "Oh, this guy's really insightful about comedy and how it works." Not just from a business standpoint, but from an emotional standpoint – about taking advice from management and agents. He's like, "No, you just gotta do what you know is gonna work." He talked about having a really bad taping because he listened to the advice of somebody else versus what he thought he should do during a taping. Very much self made, self reliant, trust your instincts on things.

### **I think Stanhope said any piece of advice is just gonna make you more like that person.**

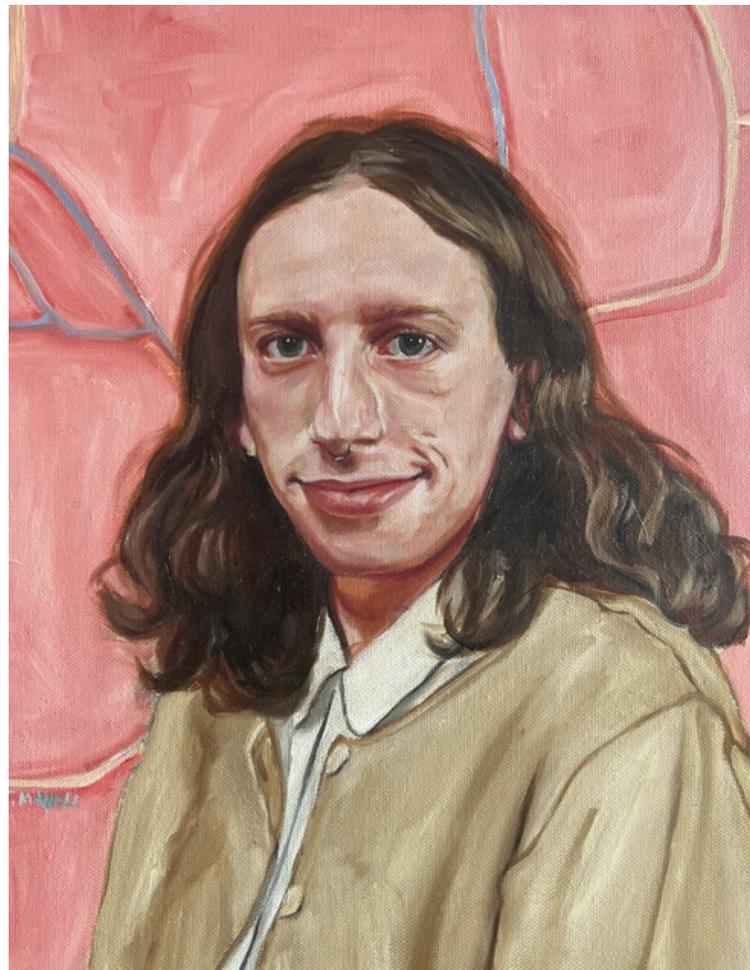
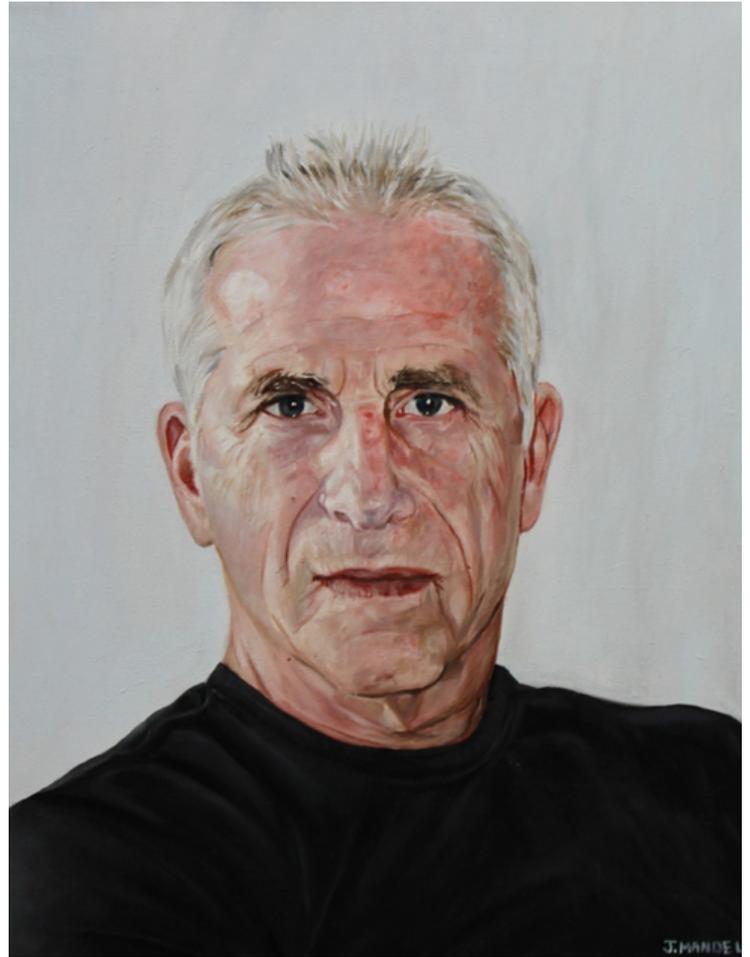
Yeah, what works for one person doesn't work for another person. That's why I don't like standups telling me how the world works. Like, no, you know how the world works for you. You don't know how it works for me. You're 30, never had a day job or a career, and you're gonna tell people that just got off a ten hour shift to come see you what reality's all about? Your reality is different than their reality. I can only tell you about my life. If you wanna laugh at my life, come along with me, but I don't know what's going on with you. I don't know, I'm talking up my ass now.



# ARTWORK: JOSEPH MANDEL



**ARTIST JOSEPH MANDEL (@JMANDELART) SPECIALIZES IN PORTRAITURE. HE ENJOYS DEPICTING PEOPLE IN AN HONEST WAY IN ORDER TO CAPTURE THEIR ESSENCE THROUGH TRADITIONAL CREATIVE METHODS. A LIFE-LONG STUDENT OF ART HISTORY, JOSEPH LOVES TO INSERT STYLISTIC REFERENCES IN HIS WORK FROM SOME OF HIS FAVORITE ARTISTS. HE HAS SAID, "PAINTING SOMEBODY'S PORTRAIT IS THE MOST INTIMATE WAY FOR ME TO KNOW THEM." OUTSIDE OF STANDARD PORTRAITS, HE ENJOYS PAINTING POP CULTURE SUBJECT MATTER. FROM ROCK STARS AND CELEBRITIES, TO ALIENS AND DROIDS, JOSEPH LOVES WORKING WITH A VARIETY OF SUBJECT MATTER.**



**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO  
MADE THIS POSSIBLE.**

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?  
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

**DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**

