

RED DOT INTERVIEW – EDWARD WARREN HARRIS, *THE LAST ONE*

INTERVIEWED BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA ON JULY 9, 2020



Edward Warren Harris,
The Last One, 2020
Oil on canvas and recycled fabric,
3 x 11 1/2 x 14"
Courtesy of the artist.

AG: Can you tell me a little more about the artwork that you submitted for Red Dot this year?

EWH: The work is actually a series of three that was more focused on the identity of a person, or at least what we usually perceive at face value. I want to explore that a bit, or at least [the] concept [of] “face value,” [by] trying to figure out what may be behind that. Most times, people [are] completely different when don't know them. You can imagine

that [a] person acts differently around friends or, if you get to know that person, you find out they have different things going on in their life. The concept itself is evolving because I'm still making current work starting from there, but that's what *The Last One* in particular is about.

AG: How would you describe the process of working on this series or the preparation that goes into it?

EWH: I actually make the faces [myself] or try to draw them out in my sketchbook. [I'm] trying to figure out motifs that I have going, what I can use for that, or at least how I would [symbolically] show that through my work. Once I get to that process, I also start getting the materials, and then I pretty much just go for it. At least for me I just go hands-on and do it that way. After that, I play it by ear somewhat, [go] by how I feel that day, and try to transcribe that into the work. I just keep going through that process until I actually feel like it's done.

AG: Do you feel that there are any experiences from your childhood or your youth that influence the art that you make today?

EWH: Oh yeah, of course. A big motif in my work, at least currently, mostly dates back to when I was younger. I actually [have] ADHD which is not a super big problem, but I had a big learning deficit when I was younger. At that time when I was in kindergarten and growing up in grade school, I always felt like I was two people. At school [I'd] take my medication and be completely focused, and then when I [got] home I [was] just myself, but I never felt like one person even I was younger. This kind of continued on up

until my high school years still, but I still took medication. Even then I felt like I couldn't explore who I was truthfully as an individual because I always felt like I was behind some certain mask that some people would perceive unless they actually got to know me. From there, it kind of crept back into my work and I was starting to develop that type of voice that I'm working with. I realized that [motif] reaches [further] back than I thought it would.

AG: You mentioned that your work has a motif. Do you think your work commits to this specific motif or a specific style or method?

EWH: For me, it does slightly change because sometimes it turns into something else that represents [the two-faced motif], but it changes throughout my work. Even in my older works, [my methods are] a bit different. It usually changes overtime. The motif pops up in and out [of my oeuvre] and I'm just exploring more of it, but it always deals with the face. It always returns to that.

AG: I was looking at your other work and I can see definitely like this motif of the face. I saw your *Pillow Boy* series and *Gabriel*, where you wearing a gray hoodie and a black morph-suit.

EWH: Yeah, that's what that was. [*Gabriel*] had that same feel of identity, but with that work I was exploring the concepts of relationships and how we would perceive someone with no recognizable features, how someone can actually approach that person or even befriend them. That in itself is an exploration of that kind of topic. Even then, I felt like a

blank slate. That was 2-3 years ago when I was doing it, so even that [work] in general was kind of the same [motif that] I was tackling.

AG: Have you had an experience with art that changed your life?

EWH: Funny that you say that. I currently work at Ruby City as a visitor associate, and luckily [there's] a lot of works that I love. One of them [that] actually inspired me for the longest time was the Glenn Ligon piece *A Stranger in the Village #11*. I've seen his work before in textbooks of course, but at the time I didn't really grasp it even though I was in an art history class [that] moved straight by that kind of [work]. But actually, sitting or standing there rather in close proximity, looking at it, and even researching it has led me to a deeper research that led me to expanding on this new series as well as a current work that I'm still working on. [This work] expands on that idea of just living in society in general and having that type of approach of individual, or a face, or being a mask, and trying to be your actual self but trying to fit in.

AG: Where would you like to see art history go in the future? I feel like a lot of art history is centered on a very Euro-centric, whitewashed pedagogy

EWH: Honestly, I hope it will probably include more demographics: people like myself, or you, or anyone of color. As you said, it's very whitewashed especially when we're learning it from art history. We have run into the same problem where we only hear of the masters which are usually Euro-centric like Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, or Henri Matisse. The ones that we don't really learn of until we actually dig deeper are Sam Gilliam, Glenn Ligon, or even Isaac Julien. I just want [art history] to be more

inclusive along with its staff too. I read up on how [institutions] barely have any people of color in certain staff with museums. Luckily, they're kind of working towards that right now, but I would like to see more of that in art history or at least for the future of people like you and me or anyone that wants to get into that field.

AG: Do you feel that living in San Antonio has shaped your art in any way?

EWB: I want to say yes because I did go to school at UTSA, and I would say if I didn't go to school at UTSA I probably wouldn't be the kind of artist I [am] today. Culturally, I want to say not as much until recently. I start getting more involved with trying to learn more about myself. My mom is a native San Antonian as am I, and I grew up on the East Side which is usually a low income area. I was one of the lucky ones that kind of got out, but I still feel like [there's] more work to be done to improve that side of town, but also San Antonio in general. But yeah, living in San Antonio did mold my art making in some way, especially recently.

AG: Do you think that your art responds to questions about the future or questions about the past?

EWB: I would probably say more of the future. Even though it does delve [into] my personal past, it also [works] toward the future. I want to say I look back into the past to actually improve going forward into the future.

AG: Like you use what you learned in the past to answer questions about the future?

EWH: Yes.

AG: I'm looking at a picture of *The Last One*, and it's blue on a black background.

Can you talk to me a little bit more about the color scheme?

EWH: I chose blue mainly for the fact that blue is such a cool color. It brings certain emotions that we usually equate with somber type of moods: sadness, certain feelings of depression, or just a low feeling. I've been using a lot of ultramarine because Cobalt blue is a [pop art] type of color, which is a good color too, but I'm aiming for melancholy. I usually use like a combination of darker shades of blue and lighter shades to kind of give it a soft kind of subtlety as well.

AG: What would you say is the experience of having your artwork purchased for private collections?

EWH: This is actually my first experience in that kind of realm, so I'm a little excited honestly. At the same time if someone does want to collect my work, I just want to make sure it speaks to them on some level. If they enjoy having it and actually have a personal experience with it, that is my biggest goal: if someone can relate to it or find some message that's their own. That's pretty much why I do what I do: just to share some personal experience and perspective, and if they like it or can relate to it, then that itself is my ultimate goal. I feel that if that happens, then that's great and that's what I want. Now, unfortunately I can't meet them in person, but if it were possible I'd probably rather talk to them in person, pick their brain a little bit to see how they perceive the work, and create a bigger dialogue that might go into something else.

AG: Where's the best place to follow you for updates?

EW: I would honestly say Instagram @edwardw.h.art, that's actually my only outlet. I'm usually on there all the time and I update most of my work as well. I have some works in the highlights, so you can view some of my older work that's not on my website yet.

AG: Is there anything else you'd like to say/share?

EW: To whoever is out there [reading] this, I hope you have a good day, I hope that you're safe out there, being safe, making good choices, and no matter whose work you end up picking or choosing, I just hope that that work speaks to you personally and that you find something within it that sparks something within your heart.

ABOUT EDWARD WARREN HARRIS

Edward Warren Harris is an artist based in San Antonio, TX. In 2018 he earned a BFA from UTSA and previously studied at Mississippi Delta Community College. His work has been exhibited throughout Texas and he has been a performer, working in collaboration with artists Narcissister and Mila Hundertmark. More at www.edwardwarrenharris.wixsite.com/arte

ABOUT ÁNGELA GARCÍA

Ángela García is Blue Star Contemporary's Arts, Letters, and Enterprise summer intern from McAllen, TX. She is pursuing a BA in Art History at Trinity University and plans to study architecture after receiving her undergraduate degree. García has also worked as a studio intern for Artpace San Antonio, a radio host for KRTU 91.7FM, and has done volunteer work at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX. She works in digital and film photography and analog collage.