

Becoming: Tiffanie Turner

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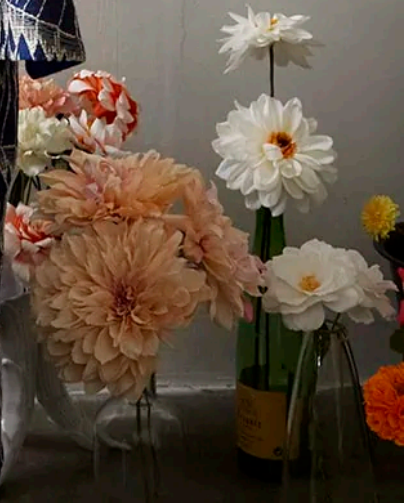
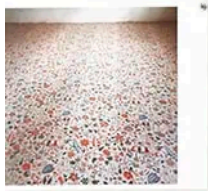
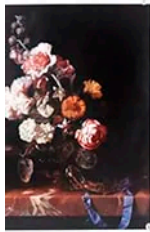


FIRST TIME
DRINK COGNAC



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GOSSIP



This year we were inspired by Michelle Obama's book, [Becoming](#), our [Book Club book for January](#), and we decided to focus on learning from women who we find inspiring and can tell us about their journey of "becoming". You can read the rest of the interviews [here](#). Stay tuned for more each month.

You've probably seen the work of paper flower artist, Tiffanie Turner and gawked. Her work is extraordinary. It's both incredibly life like yet utterly whimsical. I've had the fortune to follow Tiffanie's work from the beginning and every single photo I see is jaw dropping, even now, years later. It's all paper! We were even fortunate to host the San Francisco artist at a workshop at our studio here in Utah. Tiffanie is the author of [The Fine Art of Paper Flowers](#), a tutorial based book on how to create her stunning masterpieces. She has a show at [Eleanor Harwood Gallery](#) called What Befell Us until June 15th. Go see it for yourself!



Interview with paper flower artist Tiffanie Turner

What did you want to be when you were young?

An artist! We found a book from my preschool where each child drew a self-portrait and answered questions about

themselves. I say I want to be an artist. I don't remember saying that, though!

What do you consider yourself? Artist, designer, crafter, etc.

An artist. I have said "no" to a lot of opportunities in order to keep my paper flower work couched in the art world. It definitely started in craft, and then went to decor/design, and only now am I able to say no to commissions so I can create the work I've been personally wanting to create for years. Each piece takes 4-6 weeks to make, so the backlog of things I want to express and depict with my work, and the backlog of actual floral specimens, is gigantic. It's a little torturous, actually.

How did you get started in your field doing what you do?

Honestly, I saw the beautiful flowers you were making
[Brittany's note: gasp!] and discovered crepe paper, which is

now my sole medium. The crepe paper really hooked me in. I had been an amateur botanical painter previously, and my interest in botany combined with the paper led me to start trying paper flowers. At first, they were just fantasy flowers, but I soon got back to realism, which is a big love of mine in all artwork. The first giant flower I made came from an epiphany. I was thinking about a peony pinata, but thought of a way to shape the base so that the petals could come from within. Once I saw there was an interest in this work, I made it my daily practice. It took some time to develop into the work I'm doing now.

What did you study? Did you go to school specifically for what you do?

I have a five-year Bachelor of Architecture from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Architecture programs start specific and are immersive. And back before computers, they were really fun. Studying architecture opens your mind to all of the possible ways a space, or place, can exist, and I credit that with any "outside the box" thinking I've done in my adult life.

Did you have anyone along the way that was instrumental in the trajectory of your life?

I think at the end of the day it is my husband, David. He is the one who suggested I not try to work and raise the kids at

the same time, at least while they were very young. As a working professional architect that concept hadn't even crossed my mind. Giving me time to think and breath, when our kids were younger (they are 9 and 13 now), was the hugest gift. I had worked since I was 13-14, and having a few years where I didn't have to show up anywhere except for the kids allowed me to sort of "reinvent" myself. We definitely sacrificed a lot financially for that, so I will forever be grateful for that time and experience.

What's your workspace like? What's your dream workspace like?

Until our recent move out of San Francisco, I've always held two workspaces at one time, the primary one being our kitchen counter, and a secondary proper studio across town that was hard to get to but was a sacred space for me when I could get there. Now that we live in the hills of western Marin, I've got a rustic treehouse garage studio perched high above our hill, but once the cold weather came this winter, the condensation was too hard on the paper and I had to move inside. I am looking forward to getting back out there in the spring. With children, it's very hard to use a separate workspace, as I need to be with them while I work. My dream space is sort of like my garage studio now, a big, open space so I can work on the floor. Wide open floor area inspires me with all its potential!

What's a typical day like for you?

I get up at 5:00 a.m. every day, have coffee, and dive in. Usually, I don't sculpt in the early morning because it can be noisy, so I'll work on making petals. After I get the kids off to school I only have a little over five hours to work until it's time to pick them up. I'll work nonstop during that time, and then again once they are home until dinner. Because I'm preparing for a show, I will usually work through or after dinner until I go to bed around 10:00. My husband is a great supporter of my work and knows I won't really be participating in family things and weekend activities until the

show, so Saturdays and Sundays I've been working about 17 hours straight!

What's a piece of advice that you've carried with you and who is it from?

Keep evolving. I mention it again, but it's so valuable. I got it from San Francisco illustrator Alyson Thomas when I was talking to her about people who were copying my work several years ago.

Is there something you'd like to achieve that you haven't yet?

I'd like to receive a thoughtful, positive review of my work from someone far outside my personal and professional circles. Someone like Jerry Saltz (personal hero), who might see what I am trying to say with my work. That would be so validating for me.

What's coming up for you in 2019?

I love having plans laid out for an entire year, and 2019 is mostly booked. I am preparing for my solo show in San Francisco at Eleanor Harwood Gallery in San Francisco which opens April 19, 2019. It is called What Befell Us, and it is a meditation on marriage on a macro level, with a parallel theme of what the search for "perfection" in our society are doing to our natural world. I explore the idea of beauty and our tolerance for imperfection in this current work. I'm so excited and only wish I had four more hands right now. I also have two pieces in the upcoming "Pulp + Process" at the Society for Arts and Crafts in Boston. That opens on February 21.

After that, I'll be teaching two long-form retreats with The Makerie, one in June in my home state of New Hampshire, the other outside of Toulouse, France in September. Those each take considerable time to prepare for, so I won't get back to creating new work until late fall, which is a little scary for me. I don't have a 2020 exhibit lined up yet but am hoping to mount a show that might travel to a few places. I like when my work can be seen other places besides the Bay Area.

Where do you live?

Newly transplanted to West Marin county after 23 years in San Francisco.

What does your dream retirement look like?

Our kids would be nearby, maybe one would be working with me, even. I'd be working on some iteration of my art, on my own terms. I used to be interested in settling down forever on a huge piece of land, but now that we've been traveling more (for my work and for fun), and purchased a home last year, I have some wanderlust. I hope we have the chance to live several places during the course of a year. I'm in love with Edinburgh, Scotland right now. Would love to be there part-time when we are thinking about retirement.

What artists/designers/crafters do you look up to? Both historical or present

I love any artist that uses representational art to express conceptual ideas. I do wish I was a painter. I never properly learned. I love the work of Lucian Freud. I am forever envious of what Christian Rex Van Minnen is doing right now. I love the painter Marc Dennis. Incredible. I also look up to certain comedians and filmmakers, especially those that have made up their careers on their terms and taken their friends with them. I work in solitary, but if I could evolve my work in some way it would be to work with a team of like-minded, close friends. I think the work would benefit so much from team efforts and team input. I tend to admire the way men are doing things, but I really should think about why that is.

What do you do when someone copies your work?

It's a fine line, because I wrote a book on how to make my work, and I don't consider that copying, I love seeing work from my book. But there are others that do copy my fine artwork. Sometimes I'll say something to them, but mostly I just have to keep evolving, always. I need to be looking forward all of the time, and that works for me. There is a person who took one of my first tutorials online and posted it in another country I won't name, with no credit to me for the text or photos, and now it has become a huge industry in that country. It has been so upsetting for so long, but I'm powerless in changing that situation now, so I just try to avoid anyone from that area who is doing work based on my work. That means blocking a few thousand people online, even if they have no idea that I am the source of what they are doing. It's like putting my head in the sand, but that's how I cope with that to avoid letting it get to me.

How was social media influenced your work?

The exposure of my work to others on social media before I was represented by a gallery was instrumental in me selling

my work, and getting the attention of galleries that wanted to include my work in group shows, which kept the whole thing going. I try to keep blinders on when it comes to the work of other people making paper flowers, but follow many painters, sculptors, and galleries that remind me of my goals as an artist. I came in the back door of the art world and use Instagram as a way to discover the connections between artists and galleries doing work in different parts of the world. Also, I would not have known about half of the flowers I make if it wasn't for all of the amazing florists and farmer florists you can find on social media.

What's inspiring you lately?

I have been on a five month long deep dive on the film and television work of Taika Waititi, Jemaine Clement, and Bret McKenzie (The Flight of the Conchords). It's weird, but that feeling of watching people making something out of nothing together, especially when it comes to cinema or music, just inspires me to no end. People who do things I know I will never be able to do blow my mind. And all of their work is endlessly entertaining.

Are you where you want to be in your life?

Professionally, pretty close. I feel like I've paid my dues and can do what I want for the most part. That may change depending on how my next show is received. I receive a lot

of wonderful correspondence about what my work or the use of my book ([The Fine Art of Paper Flowers](#)) has meant for people, which is so rewarding. In regards to my family, there is nothing more I want than these three with me all the time the way they are. The only thing that is not quite perfect is the balance. There is still none. I try. But when I'm on, I'm on, and I don't do anything but work for a half a year straight. It makes the times I'm not working very free and fun for all, but these times when I'm locked down for a show or when I was writing my book are very off balance, we've just all learned to work around it. But it's not ideal.

Anything more/additional you'd like to "become" in your life?

I'd like to be someone who gives back. A lot. I feel like I give

some of myself away when I teach, and that feels good. But I want to give in a way that really changes lives. I feel unprepared and selfish right now, because I still do have ten thousand pieces of art built up in my head that will take me the rest of my life to create, but at a certain point, I think it will be clear when I need to start giving back with my time and energy. Right now my work is pretty selfish. I'd like to become much more giving.

You can find Tiffanie here:

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Tiffanie Turner portfolio (Papel SF)

[@tiffanieturner](#)

[The Fine Art of Paper Flowers by Tiffanie Turner \(her book!\)](#)

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