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Meet Kelly Elkowitz

STORIES & INSIGHTS / 4 DAYS AGO

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We're excited to introduce you to the always interesting and insightful Kelly Elkowitz. We hope you'll enjoy our conversation with Kelly below.



Kelly, thanks for joining us, excited to have you contributing your stories and insights. We'd love to hear about a project that you've worked on that's meant a lot to you.

“Four Temperaments” – my first ever solo exhibition that just showed this June at SLAG&RX – New York – Paris.

A year ago this October, I was offered the chance to show my work at SLAG&RX – New York – Paris – a gallery that I also work at as a gallery assistant. Irina Protopopescu, the director and co-founder of SLAG&RX, has always been incredibly supportive of my work, but even so, the offer came as a shock. As a young artist, I understood the seriousness of what this meant – it would be my first solo show in New York, in Chelsea of all places, and at a gallery I deeply respect, where I’ve witnessed firsthand their commitment to their artists. It was an unbelievable opportunity.

Seeing this as the introduction for many to my work, Four Temperaments became a unique experience of creating work while also being aware that this was my first real chance.



From October to June, I worked steadily on the exhibition. In it, I hoped to articulate all the themes I found were present in my work – the exploration of the figure's physicality, its connection to the spiritual, the history of memento mori, the influence of medicine, and the role of my own body within the work. All these themes merged together as I worked.

In my work, I create anatomical constructions from paper, using the physicality of the material to mirror our own anatomy and make sense of ourselves. This search is where the title of the show came from – Four Temperament, the ancient medical theory that believed our personalities and mental states were determined by internal imbalances of bodily fluids. I think that's what my work is searching for too – looking at the figure's physical form as a way to make sense of why we are the way we are.

In the end, I showed seven works at SLAG&RX, and now a few months later it is still surreal to me when I think of it. Thank you to Irina Protopopescu & Eric Dereumaux for this opportunity.

As always, we appreciate you sharing your insights and we've got a few more questions for you, but before we get to all of that can you take a minute to introduce yourself and give our readers some of your back background and context?

My name is Kelly Elkowitz, and I am an artist who constructs the figure using paper and found materials. In my work, I build the figure's anatomy to try to make sense of myself and the world around me. This idea is deeply tied to that of the four humors. According to this predecessor to modern medicine, an imbalance in the four body liquids (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) would change one's personality or temperament. While too much blood would make one passionate, too much black bile would lead to a depressive personality. I think this is the heart of my work – the idea that through constructing the figure and all that's within it, I'll better understand myself and others.

When making the work, apart from the first sketch, which is purely figurative, I only use a mirror and anatomy books as references while constructing the form. My process begins with many sketches of the body, stretched and contorted in different ways. Next I create a life size version of one of the sketches over which I lay a plastic sheet that becomes the working surface for my construction. From there, I begin to build in layers – first, semi-transparent papers to represent skin, followed by found materials that form muscles, bones, organs, and veins. In this way, I work from the outside inward, unable to see the front of the piece while I'm working on it. At the end, I remove the dried amalgamation from the plastic, revealing a fully articulated form that is the reflection of the original drawing. The resulting image is that of a figure distorted, seemingly suspended and out of touch from its environment, disconnected from the world.

Currently, I am continuing this series of paper constructions, creating something between Frankenstein's creature and a paper doll.



Are there any resources you wish you knew about earlier in your creative journey?

Yes, many! Truly there are so many resources, opportunities, and potential communities out there for creatives. It can just be difficult to navigate at times.

First, NYFA and Instagram are great resources for finding open calls. Instagram especially is an incredible tool once you learn how to use it. I'm constantly discovering new spaces, galleries, and artists to follow on there.

The most important resource though is truly in your community. I am not the most social person by nature, but I found that getting out there and speaking to other creative people is incredibly important. Here in New York, there are so many artists and creatives, and most people are willing to give advice or connect with you if you give them the chance.

For artists you respect, ask their advice and pick their brains. Go to openings and open studios, drawing classes, performances. Even reaching out to artists you admire by email or Instagram can go a long way. You never know what opportunities are out there unless you ask. Through these connections, you begin to build a community that will inspire your art and support you in more ways than you can imagine.



Next, is to say yes to everything! All opportunities, big or small can lead to connection and growth within your art and yourself. Small community group shows introduce you to new artists and curators and helps strengthen your community. Some of these events you can find successfully through open calls. Though, submitting applications can be daunting and time consuming, the more practice you get as an artist, the better. I go into each application knowing it will likely be rejected but striving to make an application that is too good to ignore. With each open call, it is an opportunity to better learn how to talk about my work and tighten up my portfolio.



What's the most rewarding aspect of being a creative in your experience?

The creation is the reward. It's the little moments in the studio when something new happens and everything feels fresh again. It's also in those moments when I notice how all the influences and experiences in life make their way into the work. I feel so much that we see, listen to, and read, goes into our work and in the studio the minute you begin to create, these aspects of life and of other art begin to appear in your own work. It's this influence mixed with curiosity that creates something exciting.

I didn't expect it, but realized another reward through showing my work this summer was in connecting with people through my work. Putting your art into the world is so vulnerable, but it was in this vulnerability that I found how many people I talked to felt the same and really understood where my work was coming from. These connections make the world feel so much less lonely – knowing that my personal creations can relate so much to other's lives and thoughts. Although making the work is a very solitary thing, I think the community of sharing it is an amazing reward.