



Ben Witherick (KONFUCIUS) , Chris McBride (IDOL), and Joe Boin (DEST)

Guiding Light

by Atiba T. Edwards



I first met Ben during his visit to paint at 5Pointz (Long Island City, NY) from Australia. In one of our conversations since first meeting, Ben mentioned that art really saved his life after a near fatal accident. He recently collaborated with fellow artists, IDOL and DEST on a mural. The three share more of their story and the role art played in their lives.



Atiba: Why did each artist involved with this piece decide to turn to art?

KONFUCIOUS: I found it as an escape. In 2009, I suffered a near fatal quad bike accident, which put me out of work and left me housebound for some time. I decided to start painting as way to distract myself from constantly replaying the event in my mind. Eventually, one painting turned into another, and it wasn't long before I had a massive collection of artwork in my house. One day I decided to put a few photos of my work on Facebook, and the response was overwhelming. No one knew that I had this hidden talent. From then on I didn't stop. I eventually transitioned into using a spray can and hooked up with some other artists in Perth.

DEST: I was a drywall installer with my family business but I always wanted to do something with my art and creativity. I hated drywall and always thought I was wasting away my artistic talents. When the opportunity arose to become a tattoo apprentice, I put down my tools and shut my drywall business down almost instantly. Tattooing, although a high paying profession, quickly became a job as the novelties wore off. Being stuck in a chair for hours, tattooing annoying people who move or smell, always fighting against peoples different skin types etc.

It wasn't until I was imprisoned whilst still a tattoo apprentice that I turned to other forms of art, such as painting. Once released from prison on parole, I decided I did not want to go back to tattooing and wanted to pursue art as a full time profession. I have not looked back since. (In 2011, DEST National Prison Fellowship Art Competition award for a painting featuring Westerners in foreign jails).

IDOL: I grew up in a strict dysfunctional family as an only child and it wasn't easy to deflect anger displacement when tension was often brewing. The easiest escape was to shut my mouth, go in my room and pretend I didn't even exist. The best way I knew was to create my own world on paper. The more tension that was in the house hold the harder I would concentrate on my drawings. You'd be amazed with how creative you can get when you put your mind to it- just so you can block out every thing else.



AE: How did each of you connect to collaborate on the "Day of the Dead" piece?

K: I heard of DEST when I was in high school. I used to look up to a lot of graffiti writers in my city, and DEST was one of the most well known. He was leading the way in the Perth graffiti scene, bombing spots other writers wouldn't even dare. It turns out, I actually met him a few times, but I never knew the alter ego behind the guy I met as 'Joe,' was the graffiti writer, DEST. He used to date my cousin Michelle, but it wasn't until I found out through her that he went to jail and that Joe was DEST.

I heard that he got out of jail, so I thought that I'd send him an e-mail asking if he wanted to collaborate on a piece. He got back to me straight away and we met up that weekend and talked. We looked at both of our styles to figure out how we could work together. We decided to do a piece revolving around the circle of life. We wanted to have some Sugar Skulls in the piece, a pretty girl, roses and butterflies representing new life. DEST started doing the girl's face on the wall, and midway through doing it, decided to do her face with the day-of-the dead motifs. It looked good, fitted in with the theme, so he just ran with it.

DEST and I started the mural, but then we had to enlist the help of IDOL as we didn't quite realize the scope of the wall and how long it would take to do.

I: One morning I got a call from Joe telling me that he is working on a project in North Bridge with a new chap named Ben from Konfucius Designs asking if I wanted to help out. Knowing the endless skills that Joe possesses and trusting his judgement in Ben's capabilities in what is a new field to him meant a new and exciting challenge for all of us to combine three unique styles. I was in for a very interesting and creative few days that so happened to be a winner.

K: People may look at the sugar skulls in our piece and immediately think of death. However, the Skulls or 'Calacas,' synonymous with annual Mexican 'Día de los Muertos' celebrations, symbolize protection, strength, overcoming a tough time, and a change in one's life.



A: What does the theme "circle of life" mean for you?

I: The theme for the mural was based on coming into spring season- a season which is full of life, color, beauty, energy, warmth etc. The Day of the Dead references are a celebration of life and a remembrance of those who have passed.

All three of us have lost friends and family over the years so it was also a fitting tribute to them, and the good times and memories we have.

D: The first thing that pops into my head when you ask this question is the amount of greed that is in this materialistic, saturated world and how living a wealthy life is just not enough for people any more. Now we also want to live forever?! To me that just throws the word "sharing" out of wack. Nothing is supposed to live forever. We are put on this Earth to live, learn and strengthen our gifts of creativity- whatever they may be. Leaving an interpretation of our understanding of knowledge from those before us, for those after us, to help educate their future children.

K: Life has its ups and downs. Good times and bad. You laugh, you cry, we all ride the roller coaster of life in some way. I believe everyone has their issues that they need to deal with, everyone has a story to tell, or a cross to bear, it's just how you overcome them and turn out on the other side.



The three of us have been through some stuff in our lives. We come from different backgrounds, but have had to battle various hardships along the way.

A: As you battle the hardships, what role does love play in keeping you going? What do you love?

K: The love for art keeps us going; being able to produce something that inspires people. We see our art as a gift. Gifts are meant to be shared. Everyone was put on this earth for a reason; maybe ours was to produce cool art, who knows.

When going through difficult times, the love to push ourselves creatively keeps us going. Art provides us with an outlet, a voice, an escape, a distraction from the dramas that may be going on around us.

What do I love? I love being creative. I love being individual. I love knowing what we are doing is reaching out to people. Personally, if I could paint every day for the rest of my life, I'd be a happy man. We aren't in it for the money or fame; we get more of a kick out of people seeing our work, taking a step back, and knowing that they are taking something away from it, that we reached out to them in some special way.

I: Love?... I guess the thing that motivates me to take my art seriously is all my failed relationships. To let all those people that are and were closest to me down to follow my dreams and not actually make anything of it would make my whole life completely pointless. I feel I have come to a point of no return, besides I'm addicted to graffiti! That's a pretty good excuse right?

D: Love is a word I do not throw around lightly. In terms of relationships love does not motivate me to paint or create. I think it only slows you down. I sound like a lonely old man, which is not far from the truth. But what I do love is creating art, the feeling of creating something is my love drug. That is what keeps me going.

I love to paint and create. Whether it be drawing, airbrushing, painting and so forth Art is what I love doing and I love the fact I can earn a living from it.

A: Complete the phrase "art is"

I: Art is not a phase. It's my life!

K: Art is my medicine.

D: Art is everywhere, you just have to open your mind to see it.

To see more of the artists' work:

KONFUCIUS: www.konfuciusdesigns.com.au

DEST: www.artbydestroy.com.au/

IDOL: www.facebook.com/IdolMotions