

Nina Katchadourian

# Hamilton

## Through the Eyes of an Artist

By Tulia Day

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Conceptual artist Nina Katchadourian welcomed students and faculty to her studio (Photo: Robert Knight)

On Nov. 2, 21 senior art majors left the quiet of the Hill for New York City to engage in an invaluable experience, a three-day tour of working artist studios to learn more about a variety of art-making processes and professional journeys. Led by Professor of Art Rebecca Murtaugh, Associate Professor of Art Robert Knight, and Kennedy Art Center operations manager John Powell, the group met with conceptual artist Nina Katchadourian, painters Walter Robinson and Elizabeth Glaessner, photographer John Lehr, and sculptor Shari Mendelson. There was also a bonus visit, to the home and studio of this past fall's visiting artist, Anton van Dalen.

One thing that was evident in all the stops was the way in which the artists' work directly reflected their process and the advice they offered. Katchadourian's words to students seemed guided by the same principle of play exhibited in her artwork.

“You need to be willing to give yourself permission to try an idea, explore, play,” she told the seniors, “Don’t let your seedlings get squashed.” Walter Robinson, on the other hand, who refers to his paintings of various commercial products as his “inventory,” offered mostly practical advice, such as studying the art market to see “what works,” and reframing mistakes as “the art part” of a piece.

Elizabeth Glaessner and John Lehr both emphasized the way in which their processes and the materiality of their work informs its content. Glaessner, who is currently preparing for her second solo show at P.P.O.W. gallery, was in the flurry of experimentation with new works in silk and scrolls of mulberry paper, pushing herself to work with “really ugly colors” in the execution of character and narrative driven pieces.

Lehr offered a look inside the specific editing, picture making, and printing techniques he uses. He described how these techniques, all equally a part of his creative process, lead him to creating a specific image. “Photography is a true medium,” he explained, “It’s between me and the world, it helps me make discoveries.”

Not only were concept and process discussed, but so, too, was inspiration. Shari Mendelson described what led her to producing vessels made of recycled plastic bottles. She pulled encyclopedic volumes of ancient Roman and Syrian glassware from her library, illustrating the direct inspiration for many of her pieces. The bonus studio visit was illuminating as well, since seniors had seen Van Dalen speak about his work before, but not been made witness to his muse: the Lower East Side neighborhood where his home and studio (and pigeon coop) were located.

Sculptor concentrator Hanna Jerome, found the trip to be “an incredible experience to view a large volume of art” and to see “how diverse the art community truly is.” Seniors not only experienced the art community through the studio visits, but through explorations of the Chelsea gallery scene and an evening hosted at the home of Kirkland alumna Carol Friscia K’77, where several alumni spoke to the importance of starting art collections early by trading pieces with one another.

While common themes emerged among the artists and alumni, it was the diversity among the studio visits that seemed to most electrify the seniors’ own work upon returning to the hill. By the time the train pulled out of Penn Station, all 21 seniors were itching to get back into their own studios so they could channel the energy produced by the trip into their art making. As senior Maura Torres said, “I think it brought an excitement back to my art making, a hunger that I was starting to lose.”

The seniors and the Art Department thank the Dean of Faculty Office and the Kirkland Endowment for their support of this once in a lifetime opportunity.