



A day with Petaluma artist and educator **Orin Carpenter**

By Megan McCrea Photography by Beth Schlanker

AS ORIN CARPENTER TELLS IT, HIS ART CAREER BEGAN AT AGE 5, with painting on walls. He and his mother had just returned from the library, and he needed to paint. “This was one of those days where I ran out of paper. I was like, ‘You know what? I gotta get this out.’” Seeing the white wall, he couldn’t resist.

Carpenter’s interests have led him from his native Memphis to the Bay Area, from graphic design into a career as an artist and educator. Today, he’s a whirl of activity: teaching art at Marin Catholic, completing a doctorate in educational technology, leading workshops on art and racial justice, and, of course, making art in his studio. Recently, he’s been immersed in two series: “Quarantine State of Mind,” abstract paintings navigating this past year, and “In Danger Species,” mixed-media meditations on the experience of living while Black in America. Carpenter had been marinating on the ideas behind the latter for some time. Then last year, when Ahmaud Arbery was killed in Georgia, “I said, ‘You know what? I can’t sit on this anymore. I have to create.’ It was more for me to express and have an outlet from the anger, you know? George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the countless others. That gave the energy for that series.”

Carpenter has just been named an artist in residence at MarinMOCA, where he’ll have a solo exhibit this December, and shows his work at the Artize Gallery in Palm Springs. Carpenter has been sheltering-in-place — and teaching high school art remotely — from Petaluma, where he lives with his wife Micklele, son Kaleb, daughter Kyndall, and the family’s two rescue cats, Lando and Phasma.

4:30 a.m. I’m an early riser. I usually wake up anywhere from 4 to 5. Once I get up, being a Christian, I pray and read devotion and kind of start the day.

6:00 a.m. Sometimes I start working here, with my sketches. Then I have to get out of the space, and being outside is a refresher for me.

7:00 a.m. Early on a weekend morning, when it’s quiet, I’ll wander around downtown Petaluma, kind of meditate, sketch there. I’ll go to Starbucks, get a white chocolate mocha, and maybe a chocolate croissant. (I mean, might as well overdo it with the chocolate!) Then I visit Brian’s Comics. And I don’t care how old you are — you feel like a kid when you walk

in the place. I love going there; chatting with Brian about movies, books, writing; and then, of course, buying comic books. It just revives that energy – it reminds me of being a little boy going into the library.


10:00 a.m. I come home, start looking at notes. Right now, I'm working on concepts for some landscapes. I travel a lot with my family, and one of our favorite spots is Italy. I want to revisit Menaggio, because I just love the feel there. It's funny, because I actually called it "home." There's something about it that's comforting. So, I think of words that kind of go with "home" and Menaggio, start thinking about the color palettes there. I take photos and look at the color schemes and things that were there, and see if I connect with those, and, if so, are those the pieces and colors I want to put in my piece? Then I start playing with the values of those colors, kind of mapping out that series.

1:30 p.m. Because I'm painting, I create lunch here, to take a break and come back and paint. My wife and I joke about Italy. We do our rocket lettuce salad with Gorgonzola cheese and balsamic dressing and glaze, with candied pecans.

2:30 p.m. I have another virtual workshop coming up, where we actually use art as a vehicle to have these uncomfortable conversations, dealing with racial injustice. I like to be overprepared, so I make sure all the technical aspects are done, do a test run, and think about trouble spots, how to maneuver through that.

6:00 p.m. The family, we love trying restaurants. I think that's the beauty of Northern California – you can find great places. La Rosa in Santa Rosa is our top one [500 Fourth St., 707-523-3663]. Their carne asada is good, the risotto relleno is good, and the tequila shrimp is one of my favorites. I'll get something and Mickle will get something, and we'll try things out.



8:30 p.m. At night, it's kind of doing a checklist: making sure I had a good stopping point for the creative work I'm doing, seeing if there are other materials I need – making sure I have all the elements, so when I continue to work on it, it doesn't interrupt the flow. Emails go out for school and my PhD work. Kind of shutting everything down, making sure everything has been taken care of before I can go to sleep. 



To see more of Petaluma artist Orin Carpenter's recent work, visit orincarpenter.com.