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“YES” *to* LIFE

Dorian Vallejo paints
to get under your skin.

BY NICKI ESCUDERO



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Dorian Vallejo is never stuck for creative ideas. His next drawings spill out of him, as he carries a sketchbook with him everywhere and keeps blank pages next to his nightstand, falling asleep only after “the world starts to flicker and doesn’t make much sense.” He starts drawing immediately after waking up, believing he gets incrementally better every time he draws. “That in-between period is almost like a mini-death,” Vallejo says. “It’s darkness and black.”

That Vallejo thinks of sleep as a mini-death is striking, considering the prominence it plays in many of his paintings and drawings. The interaction of the conscious and the unconscious is a common theme in much of the Easton, Pennsylvania, artist’s work, with the same figure often seen in several layered positions in one work, as if the subject is aware of both the conscious and unconscious states she’s experiencing.

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Dorian Vallejo at
T.H. Brennen Fine Art
in Scottsdale, Arizona.
Photograph by Nicki
Escudero.

2
Sunlight Nude,
oil on linen, 44 x 51"

3
Dream Ripple,
oil on canvas, 55 x 71"

4
Dream Study,
mixed media, 17 x 14"

5
Shadow Dance,
oil on linen, 57 x 55"



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Vallejo's admiration for psychotherapist Carl Jung and mythologist Joseph Campbell translates to his art, which he says is inspired by the process of individuation and living an authentic lifestyle. These influences came at a young age for Vallejo, who became a professional artist as a teenager and whose artistic and psychological tendencies are in his bones: his father, Boris Vallejo, is a famed science fiction and fantasy illustrator of titles such as *Mirage*, while his writer mother, Doris, exposed him to European philosophers such as John-Paul Sartre and the theory of existentialism at a young age.

"My mom would get me to read books and ask me what I thought was happening in them beyond the surface level," Vallejo says. "It was always challenging to me that way. When we looked at artwork, she'd say, 'Don't just look at it on the surface. What's going on underneath? Why that color?'"

"Those two influences, those early seeds that were planted by my mother and father, really helped shape what I'm doing now," Vallejo says, though he doubts he'll ever collaborate with Boris because of the different artistic paths they're on. "I still

think those thoughts: 'Don't just do a pretty picture—add something to it.'"

Vallejo says his gallery work allows for much looser interpretation than the detailed portraits and commissions he also paints, as the female figures he features represent themes such as the birth of ideas and respect for life. His gallery work often begins with him reading, something such as *The Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition's* newsletter *Parabola*, then using inspirational passages to help develop an idea, which includes a universal, archetypal depiction that allows for varied interpretation by viewers.

"Art is at its best, for me, when it can get underneath the skin of someone else and grab their heart and remind them what it's like to be alive, to be a human being," Vallejo says. "When we see something like that, it can kind of remind us how much mediocrity we have to wade through on a daily basis before we actually come into contact with something we say 'yes' to. We've all seen it in great works of art—it's our 'yes' to life. We see something so beautiful, so profound, done by another human being, and it reminds us



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of what it's like to be alive."

In Vallejo's *Shadow Dance*, the female subject is gracefully poised, bathed in shadows atop what seems to be water, which Vallejo says he uses to symbolize the unconscious. The shadow isn't simply dark and evil—it symbolizes challenges that make us stronger, the "stress that builds



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our character and makes us better people,” Vallejo says. *Sunlight Nude* depicts a figure surrounded by flowing bright colors that make her appear especially ethereal. Vallejo and his dancer model worked on the concept together, devising new poses each time they came up for air during the underwater photography shoot.

Dream Study, a mixed-media drawing, features the subject in many different dreaming poses, an experimentation based on the idea of the unconscious and how people fall asleep. More drawings by Vallejo are found in his book *Drawings: Inspired by Life* (\$44.99), featuring about 100 of his drawings, including some thumbnails of what became large-scale paintings.

One person instantly excited by Vallejo’s

work is Trey Brennen, owner of T.H. Brennen Fine Art in Scottsdale, Arizona, who says he has been thrilled to carry it in his gallery since this past summer because of Vallejo’s flawless precision and thought-provoking structuring of subject matter.

“Dorian Vallejo allows the viewer to witness his fascination with several ideas that overlap both philosophically and aesthetically,” Brennen says. “The artist feels beauty can be a metaphor, and with his impeccable technique, the courageous construction of his subjects and a palette that invites you in, the work leaves our collectors thirsting for more works by Dorian Vallejo.”

More is always coming from Vallejo. Peek inside his sketchbook, and you’ll see illustrations based on ideas relating to

serpents, moon phases and labyrinths.

“I’m so curious to see what’s coming next, I can’t wait to hold a pencil in my hand,” Vallejo says. “Drawing is almost addictive, because I want to get better. If I’m in the airport, I’m drawing. If I’m in the car and it’s stopped, I’m drawing. Many ideas for paintings have come in that way, just waiting around, working on little ideas. It’s a regular practice that excites me.” ●

DORIAN VALLEJO

When: Ongoing

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