

BIOGRAPHY

Hugo Alvarado.

A biography tends to point to the important moments in a person's life. If I have to write one, of course it will be self serving. It's hard to do it without pointing to the good times over the bad times. So, I will be very brief on that and tell instead how it's been for me to be an artist all these years - a little bit of my journey from the early days of my work and life to today.

Born in Chile

Came in exile to Canada in 1976

And here began my professional life as an artist:

My life as an artist probably extends over the course of time since I was a child. You don't become something from one day to the other. You start with things that may seem not too important. It all started in my early childhood. The characters, the histories and popular myths, the histories of far away ships full of ghostly pirates and beautiful mermaids, the color of the ocean and the mountain always so near from wherever I was as a child. The immense tables of color seen from the mountains, the fields of corn, wheat, the vineyards that extended forever big in the eyes of a child, the rivers playing like long serpentines on the laps of the earth. The smell of the grass, the eucalyptus, the rain, there started my life as an artist.

I saw a goat and a donkey, a horse and a man and we looked each other eye to eye. I saw the moon and looked for the image of a little donkey and a poor child and a mother. My mind and my eyes they were always looking and finding things, and one day I went up that small mountain, where the home of my grandparents lay sleeping in the valley under the mountain and I looked down and I saw that goat, that horse, that man from a different point of view. I was very little probably, sitting down on the top of that mountain, when I saw and realized the incredible view. And I jumped and probably said "holy shit", everything looks different from here. It all depends where I am or where they are. That was a magnificent discovery to the eyes of a child. Back at home, I started to paint and draw what I saw. My tools were my hands and my memories, and today, after a life I still paint and bring from the past and from the future, from the up and downs. Some things are from very near these times, some from times long past and I realize once more that we are, see and feel as we do because of our point of view. Be it art or politics or whatever. So in a way, painting taught me what is so hard to do and learn, to be a little bit more tolerant. You look at my work as any other work and you will see something different than what I saw or intended to paint, you see with the eyes of your own life, your point of view, your childhood, your history. We carry with us a past and what we see is influenced by that. So, I was an artist since I was a child, and what child is not? Only I didn't know it at that time and I didn't have the training.

Every child is an artist in his or her own way; they only have different things to see. A child from here sees very different things from a child from Africa, or Iraq or Europe, but they all have the tools of an artist. They have these immense eyes in their souls, asking, looking, wondering, discovering. Their heart is still free, free to feel with love or with pain, free to express it as they see it, no cosmetics in that. I see my kids and I see all of that in them, the four of them and all the other friends of my children. An artist is someone who never passes that stage of wonder, observation, touching, feeling with the tips of the fingers. Telling others what have you seen today in this world and how you feel about it.

I always wanted to paint, to play music and maybe write. I knew that I wanted to create. I didn't know yet how. I didn't have an early formal education in art. Not in my country, not with my family. So, I educated myself from the beginning in the basics without even knowing that I was doing it. In the end after passing briefly by other medias of expression, finally I came to paint and I feel that it is the only thing that I know how to do better. I can survive doing other things, but other people they know better than me how to do those things and also, this is what makes me feel alive, makes me feel a person, a human being that can contribute something meaningful to life. I hope I do.

The life of an artist tends to be glamorized by people, sometimes the media, sometimes by the artist himself. But in reality, an artist is like any other human being when it comes to reality and practicalities. We do the same things, we need a home, we have a family to feed. We have responsibilities like any other parent if we have children. It seems to me that artists from the beginning of time have been put high up to serve the purpose of others be it a King a Pope, a collector or a group. And yet the artist has to live. I will say it better: "Has to survive". Artists, we survive. After many years of a career it gets better. The world opens to you. Doors that they were closed to you before open in mysterious ways and the market plays in your favor. If you are a well known artist, the prices go up. But how long did it take? How many nights of wondering how you will get the clothes for your little ones this new school year? Artists we survive and in this country we do it like royalty in other countries. We are lucky but we have to learn to survive too. Once you reach a certain point you do ok, but it doesn't matter how good you do, you don't have the continuity and security of a salary. That it is the economic difference between an artist for almost 30 years and a teacher, carpenter, lawyer for 30 years. But no one told me that it would be easy.

Today, I still wonder sometime how I did it. How so many people and companies got my work. How so many people like the paintings when they are so simple sometimes, so unpretentious, so like a child and suddenly they are ironic or strong in calling it as it is, and sometimes they achieve sensuality like a woman in the early morning. Love, pain. Art.

The labor of a painter is surrounded by solitude and contemplation and yet you are not alone and you are not a monk. But you need to be alone with yourself, go where no one goes, find there what you want to say and bring it back from deep in your soul, all of this in

a simple way, no rhetoric in this, because we can explain it very nicely, beautiful words but we may never reach that inside and all will be just words. For an artist it is very easy to fall in that trap, beautiful words to my work, to explain the inexplicable.

Art is a struggle and it is full of doubts, fear of never grasping the big thing, the perfect painting maybe it will never be. Fear of take the easy way. An artist can fall easily in the commercial way of a lot of little for less.

I know people can recognize my work and identify with it and that makes me proud. Just plain folks can look somewhere at a painting and they say "that is an Alvarado". What a great feeling. Not because it makes me feel important, but because in a way, somehow, I touched that person so they can remember. Remember the little houses, the ones that fly in the sky or perch in the mountain, the ones that grow in the middle of the prairie or in the ports of Chile and by association remember my name.

I have my own style and my own ways, and I don't even try to copy in any way someone's work. How can I do that? I know so little - how can I go and copy someone else's work? So I go walking my days, painting the colors that my instincts tell me and I want to be truthful and at the same time, creative, so I can enrich the vision and the impression.

It is a mystery this labor of painting. You start the day, go to work and you don't know where this painting will bring you. Your intuition will be your guide today and you will be in for a big surprise sometimes. The mystery of painting. Intuition? Yes, that gives freedom to express and to search. It is not easy. It would be more easy to go for the photographic rendition but in my case I need to be free and loose, like no effort went in the doing it, like a child playing with colors, spontaneous and yet each stroke is well directed to give the total value to the work. So somehow this work becomes visceral. I don't even have to think any more about what will be the next color or mixture of colors. It is spontaneous, it is there deep inside me. Experience? Technique? I don't know. It doesn't matter, it just happens and I don't have to tell you that an angel came and touched me, because that would be a lie.

I would like to leave behind a body of work that will enrich the life of others. I would like to leave a smile in many faces. An example of someone that came from far away with a heavy luggage of memories and a light one in the practical sense and yet was given the chance to do good to him and to others. Paintings full of life, hope. Paintings sometime contradictory in a world where after thousands of years we still fight about if my God is a better God than yours, like children fighting in the school yard about my father is bigger than your father. We look around us in this beautiful land of the people. We look and we hear of other places. We don't live in a vacuum so we hear and see in the news, in the internet, in the paper and TV, injustices so strong that we feel sick sometimes. Hunger, sickness, wars. I love to have the privilege to tell others with my paintings that we have a better way, here, in this earth, a way of tolerance, freedom for all, respect for everybody and everything. That man, that animal, that tree, that stone. Why kick it if it didn't do anything

to bother me? In a little way, I committed long ago to give my work as much as I can to help others and in this way to help me. Help me to overcome my selfishness, my little fantasies of just being a big artist full of himself and in the way forgetting the important things.

Painting has helped me to discover who I am. What I want from this life and what I can do to help even in a little way to make this a better world.

As an artist I admire many other artists, some of them contemporaries to us, some of them far away in time. But the ones that I like the most are my children. I look at them and I see what they are telling me. I see those of my two boys, in their adulthood now. I remember the moment, the history behind that little painting that they did when they were just little kids. I see the paintings of my little girls and I see the same ingenuity to convey what they see and what they want to tell us. These are the things that accompany me everyday, my children, their work, and our memories. What a lucky person I am. I can work in a place called my studio, surrounded by these beautiful things and people.

I have a beautiful wife, too, so, a beautiful family that makes my work easier. I'm proud of my children. They are good people, good and caring human beings, beautiful and compassionate. My wife is the brain of the house, the pillar of normality and practicality. She is the left side where I am the right in the brain of this home. I have a beautiful wife. Strong, intelligent and sharp like a sparkle in the dark. Her profession is far removed from mine and yet we are very close. My wife doesn't ask me for anything that she doesn't give to this family. We have what we have and with that we make happiness. And for that, I'm infinitely grateful to her, my companion, my friend, and my love.

So, in a way, this is who I am. This is my history, my biography. I wish I could say it better, but well, you know what I mean.

-- Hugo