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Daniel Hawkins

VOYAGELA STAFF  
FEBRUARY 18, 2019

Today we'd like to introduce you to Jenn Berger.

### Every artist has a unique story. Can you briefly walk us through yours?

I started making art when I was twenty years old. I was in college at the time in New Orleans. I wanted to do a semester abroad and found a tiny art program on an island in Greece. I didn't think it was for me at first since I was studying philosophy and it just hadn't occurred to me that art was a possibility. I was walking home from school one day when I had an epiphany: "Why couldn't I study art?" I went to the school in Greece and continued making art ever since.

### Please tell us about your art.

My work is project-based, so it varies from one work to the next. One through line is portraiture since I often work from images of specific people and animals. I take the images from the internet or photograph subjects in person.

I have a collection of works where I combine video, drawing, and sculpture to form singular figures, such as that of a life-size giraffe, a giant standing cat, or Hillary Clinton as a child. For example, "Look At Me; Turn Around" combines video footage of a giraffe's head, drawings of its neck and legs, and a three-dimensional fur-covered structure depicting the mid-section. These different modes of representation (video, drawing, and sculpture) combine into one cohesive form that simultaneously breaks apart when you consider it by each medium or element.

I also make "skinned" sculptures by attaching leather to an internal structure, recalling the process of taxidermy. "The Blob" is a 12-foot tall sculpture of an obese human-like form. Similar to the works mentioned above, this figure is both unified and fractal, with its limbs and torso fitting together like a doll and its piecemeal leather skin.

For about the past five years, I've been working on a series of drawn portraits based on strangers that I encounter. I photograph each person with my phone and then spend weeks drawing from their image. Since I'm working from digital prints and include an abundance of detail, I end up mixing digital noise from the image with marks on a subject's skin. From afar, these drawings read as fully-formed subjects. If you get up close, though, and immersed in all the details, these figures start to fracture into bits.

As I'm making my work, I think about the relationship between an individual's actual body (vulnerable to aging, illness, and death) and this detached self that exists independently online in images. Specifically, with the portraits of strangers, I wonder why we are drawn to one person over another, what we project about people based on their image, and this impossible sense that if you just look closely enough, you could see your way into the being of someone else.

### Do you have any advice for other artists? Any lessons you wished you learned earlier?

I think the most important thing is to keep working. I plan to be working right up till the end.

When I'm struggling with something I'm making, I go back to something my friend said: "If it was easy, anyone could do it."

For me, I wish I would learn to have faith in timing. When grants or residencies or shows haven't worked out and then something comes together at a later date, it always ends up being the right time for it to happen. I want to keep that in mind!

### How or where can people see your work? How can people support your work?

I'm currently in a group show at Elevator Mondays (near downtown LA) that's on view till March 4th. I also have a website and Instagram, where I share my current work and upcoming shows.

- [voyagela.com/interview/meet-jenn-berger/](http://voyagela.com/interview/meet-jenn-berger/)