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Cedarville Review Artist Spotlight: Savannah Hart

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Tell me about yourself.

I come from a family that is very close. They are definitely my best friends. They did an awesome job raising us to be best friends, and I’ve also known Biblical truth my whole life and was raised in a family that believes with a lot of personal sincerity. There’s not much room for artificiality in my family (laughs). So God has, for reasons that I still don’t know, God has definitely preserved me and blessed me richly in that way, that sincere faith in Him has been a very strong reality for my family and for myself, and I’m so thankful for that. I do come from an artistic family. If they are not artistic of themselves, they support and have a passion for the arts. The biggest example is the fact that I have a sister...My sister, who is my person, she’s my favorite human on this planet...she is the other artist on this planet who I have done the most growth through and with. She is an actress, so theater is her field. And she is one of the most wonder-filled and kind-hearted people I know, so so much of my wonder for the world around me and for the humans around me was nurtured by her, and she definitely taught me that art is the study of humanity and that the strongest art is about the story of humans and
human relationships. So, she’s really important in my life.

I’ve also always known that I love art and that I want to be a visual artist. I don’t even remember a light-bulb moment of discovering that that’s what I wanted to be, because it’s always been that way. And my parents are so incredibly supportive of children with impractical dreams... I realized how rare that was. I have been so, so fortunate my parents are very impractically supportive (we both laugh).

**How do you feel that the impractical dreaming feeds into your faith and the practice of your art?**

I think the object of my faith enables me to be impractical and not to worry about it. It’s totally up to God to provide for me if He has directed me in such a clear and strong way, and if I’m obeying him, then He will provide for me one way or another. I think that trusting that a Being who is so much bigger is in control, that enables me to be impractical.

**What are the themes in your work that you feel have evolved or that you have pursued?**

My work is deeply faith-saturated. And I’m also one of those; I’m a believer and an artist who does not buy into the idea that cliche Christian messages are sometimes held onto too tightly and so often demean the quality of artwork. So I’m definitely one of those people that does not think that art always has to be evangelistic. I am happy when I see believers who feel free to make art that isn’t necessarily or directly or blatantly about Jesus and their faith. But for me, it just naturally comes. My art is where I ask my questions. And I have a lot of really deep spiritual questions, and confusions and frustrations and art is totally where I express that confusion and frustration, and it’s also where I get to communicate really creatively what I have discovered in my searching and in my struggling, and it’s also a way to compel my viewers to ask and seek and struggle for themselves.

And especially in this past year, I’ve realized that my themes manifest from two questions that tend to surface: How does the finite interact with the infinite? How on earth does that work? Because that is what we are designed for, it’s why we exist, and it’s exactly what we’re incapable of properly doing. And so much of it is due to our broken capacity to understand, and so
as someone who craves understanding - I really do, I crave understanding - and realizes that I exist to know the infinite Maker better, like that, is why I am breathing, and as someone who is constantly running into my insufficiencies to do so. Oh, and the other question is: What are the effects of a human’s broken capacity to understand on the mind and on society? The more I grow in my understanding of art and sociology, the more I am so intrigued by realizing why people do what they do. A lot of my artwork is also observing those effects. They are not directly or primarily as spiritual as my other pieces, but they’re totally linking back to the spiritual crisis of the human.

How do these two questions influence your choice of materials and explain your pieces?

I use reclaimed material and found objects, and it makes me feel good to clean up clutter. I think I am a very green person. It feels better to use that type of stuff. I’m saving space. I’m not wasting material by buying new stuff. I’m using what’s already been given to me. It kinda feels really good to recycle, and that’s a sociological issue, which is more secondary and subconscious. And also I’ve discovered that the topics of my art - it’s hard to manifest them in an image. They’re more like diagrams of thought, very metaphorical. And so they’re not very realistic or naturalistic. I’m creating this abstract metaphor of my thought process. And so as far as a painting or drawing, that can be hard to accomplish. Whereas, if I’m using a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional sculpture, that opens up possibilities, because it doesn’t have to be realistic or depictive. If I’m making a piece about how humans are so good at making disconnects, why don’t I use something that references a human brain and then actually collect literal cords and outlets?

So, you lean towards sculpture so that the viewer can engage to a greater degree?

Yeah, the possibilities are more open, and the outcome is much more unpredictable.

Do you feel like you have to surrender to some of the concepts? Are there times when you struggle to share a concept because you have to be vulnerable? Is there a certain amount of intimacy you feel you have to share with the viewer?
Yeah, I definitely feel there’s vulnerability, and even intimacy, but it goes back to the kind of family I was raised in. I’m not really scared of those things. In fact, when my family was rocked by a big secret coming out, vulnerability became all the more ferociously precious to me. So I prize that opportunity to be vulnerable because I’ve seen what the lack of vulnerability can do.

**What does the lack of vulnerability do?**

It’s super deceptive. I feel like I met a completely different person the day that secret came out. And the lack of vulnerability and how it has affected my life and family has not caused me to struggle to trust people. It’s helped me know that there is only so much I can know about the truth of a human. Whereas some people might criticize my lack of being able to doubt or hold some type of skepticism for people, I’ve learned that quality is needed. And also, God, by His grace, has had to do a lot of shaping and convicting of me to still give grace and to love people.

**Where do you see this in the context of your pieces?**

In "They Were Carried Along by the Spirit," that piece is me expressing confusion, and admitting how I don’t really understand how the holy text of Scripture has been given to us. It’s concrete to represent the unconditional truth of God, but it is broken and held together by unfired earthen-ware stitches to represent how God has still used humans to compile it, and that that’s a very imperfect means. So that’s me admitting I don’t really understand it, even though Cedarville has a very clear stance on it. It’s a big topic. And I think that piece includes some vulnerability because I know of a lot of people that have expressed skepticism and doubt about matters like that. They have hesitated to express those because of the culture. I know a lot of doubters and skeptics who have really valid questions and really valid doubts who have not shared them out of fear. Through this piece and through displaying here, I want to create an approach of vulnerability and say, “We can dialogue about our confusions and lingering questions about things that are significant. We shouldn’t be afraid to wrestle well with those issues.”
Is the wrestling a step of faith?

Yeah, I think it is. I think wrestling well is a step of faith - what I mean by that is it’s a step of courage because it can be scary to admit that you doubt something that a lot of people would not be wild about you doubting. I think it is a step of faith because it is an opportunity that we have access to because of our relationship with the Father. We can approach His throne, and by His grace, through our faith, we can dialogue with Him, and seek further understanding of Him. So I think question-asking is a crucial step of faith. And never to put us in the right and Him in the wrong, but just to admit that we don’t get it and we need help from Him to get it.

How does your experience with theater and other types of art influence your art?

The theater has ignited my passion for collaborative projects because that’s what theater is at its core: a team of people coming together. I covet that. A lot of visual art can be self-led, self-focused, and it’s doesn’t have to be, but it just naturally tends towards that. But I live collaboration. The dialogue both art forms have is my favorite part. I have said conversation is one of my favorite forms of art. Theater has helped me create artwork that will serve to start conversations. Theater has also allowed me to cross paths with other creative minds. I’ve also engaged with the English department over the years, and it’s so cool for these related but different art forms to collaborate with each other. English majors have given me a lot of the terminology and topics and history that I engage with in my art subjects, and the theater department has given a lot of the empathy and understanding of human relationships.

What do you want to stir in the viewer of your art? What is the purpose?

To compel people to know why they believe what they believe. To perceive and to engage with the world around them in an unconventional way.

Why unconventional?

It’s so much more interesting! It’s adventurous. Being aware of our surroundings and our influences and why we do what we do is really important, and unconventionality disrupts our ritual approach to life. I want to defamiliarize people with their way of thinking and approach...
to life so they can better understand why they do the things they do and why they believe what they believe. And as a Christian artist, I really want to defamiliarize people with their preconceived notions of art, and especially Christian art. I want to show the postmodern, post-postmodern, or metamodern world, that I think they’re ready for a re-presentation of the Gospel, especially in art, and that the postmodernists, they’re right - there is no hope in humanity. I would love to join the historic conversation of art by saying that hope in humanity is dead, the postmoderns have killed it. There’s nothing for us here, without God.
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE
WHAT IS A SACRED PLACE
LESSONS IN SACRED MINUTIA
THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE SPIRIT
OH THAT HE WOULD GET THROUGH TO ME