

Sean-William Dawson on Ted Fullerton

Sean-William Dawson 0:00

My name is Sean-William Dawson, artist, multidisciplinary artist, mainly known for mixed media and my prints.

Sean-William Dawson 0:07

Ted – our relationship started when I went to Georgian. I started Georgian College in 1994 for fine arts and he was the head of Fine Arts at that time. Right away, I recognize that this was a man that I should be paying attention to – the way he delivered education programs, the way he spoke about art, the way he was open to everybody, was just phenomenal. And then it continued after college too. Actually, it's funny, my career really started when I got a call from the MacLaren asking me to come in for a job interview for the VanGo program. It turned out, from what I've been told, they had called Georgian and talked to Ted and asked if he had any recommendations... and the first name he said was mine. Prior to that, I'd never thought about teaching art or anything like that. I thought I was going to be making paintings, getting them into galleries, and that was it. He said that he saw something in me, that he knew that I could teach. After my first day of teaching, that was it, I knew I was going to be doing this because I loved it. Then he curated one of my first solo exhibits. He was always there for me any time I needed it, always picked up the phone. He's not just a mentor, I now consider him a close friend as well.

Sean-William Dawson 1:15

The best thing that I ever took in Georgian was the business of art, and that was under Ted's guide. That helped me more than any other class that I ever took at Georgian. The way Ted designed that program and delivered it shaped how I made my career. It was two times that his advice really helped me out. The first was my last year of school. I was down at that time, I was really down and Ted took note of it, and he was like "what's going on?"

I'm like, "you really want to know?"

He's like, "yes, yes, I really want to know."

I'm like, "well, what am I going to do?"

You know, I had been in this institution for four years and that was everything, that was the art world that I knew. It was hitting me; I'm going to be on my own after this. I was terrified, and I was upset and worried, and he's like, "you want my advice?"

And I'm like, "Ted, I always want your advice!"

He's like, "get used to it."

This career is in waves. Ted said to me, "you're going to have highs and lows, but it's how you deal with the lows that really makes you the true professional. Everybody can be great when they're on top, but when you're down low, that's when you really have to persevere."

Sean-William Dawson 2:22

The other time, it was a smaller thing, but I felt that it helped me get to the next level of my career. Ted had given me a solo show at Georgian College. And I thought once you get a show that's it - everyone else takes care of everything else. He emailed me like, "I need this." And then I'd get it to him a week later or whatever, right? And the show went off well, but he said, "the one thing you really got to work on Sean is getting back to people with responses." And it sounds like such a silly thing, but I was younger and more naive. That really woke me up. It made me realize "Oh, that is part of the business side of it." It sounds so silly that I needed that advice, but sometimes you do. Sometimes you get so lost in just making the work.

Sean-William Dawson 3:06

Workwise what I got the most out of [Ted] him, was be very, very present when creating work. You have to be very self-aware, but also embrace the unknown. Ted really brought that to me.

The one thing that I will say that I really feel that Ted influenced as far as the way I teach, is be open to everybody and listen. Ted would listen to someone that it was obvious that they weren't going to be an artist, but he would give them just as much attention as the person that was going to do something, that he knew was going to go somewhere. And to me, that was such an admirable trait, it really is. And patience – just to learn how to listen and react, and try to be as positive as you can but also be constructive. I never heard a harsh word come out of Ted's mouth.

Sean-William Dawson 3:56

Ted, the way he taught is a bit of a different atmosphere than the way I have to teach because he taught college. The students are there because they want to be there for art. I have to stick with curriculum. I believe in teaching kids how to do things realistically, learning how to graph, how to shade properly. But then I try to have it where as we go along, they get to be more and more free. I think Ted does teach that in a way, just a bit more of a looser way. I'm not the type of artists that can do just studio time, I need to teach. The education system itself, it has to be part of what I do.

Sean-William Dawson 4:34

I really admire the way that Ted can break down work. He made me more aware of composition and how to analyze not just in my own work, but to point it out to the students. Like, "why do you think this is working?" I'll say, "well, it's because, you know, we have lines here but similar lines up here, so you guys go back and forth. You're making the viewer look at the picture as a whole." And just speaking that art language without being art language, if that makes sense. But yeah, if it wasn't for the way that Ted taught me, I wouldn't be teaching the way that I teach.