**When did you know you wanted to be an illustrator? Was there a defining moment?**

Do you know the artist James Jean? He’s this brilliant American artist, who said, “When did you stop being an Illustrator?” That is the real question. For the people who aren’t illustrators when did you stop? Because everyone draws as a kid and it’s just like when do you stop drawing? Artists just keep drawing. I’m sure everyone has a history of visual arts, like drawing obsessively as kids, but then at some point we put that in the drawer and don’t touch it anymore. I think as illustrators there’s a weird connection to our childhoods where we just keep doing it and don’t stop. There is something childish about it. I did all these other jobs, I worked in journalism, I worked in IT as a programmer, but the whole time I just kept drawing in my spare time and on weekends. I just kept at it and there were many times I didn’t think I would make a career out of it, but I just kind of kept doing it. I’m not going to say I needed to do it or wanted to do it, but I was just doing it. It was just something that has always been there since I can remember.

**Were there any restrictions regarding the climate of the creative industry or your own ability and access to facilities, when you started out?**

At some point a goal formulated that I just wanted to make a book, like a graphic novel or a comic book that I would be really proud of. That was the only expression of desire that I had. But in terms of restrictions on my work, I was terrible for a long time and still sort of am. It’s all about trying to get better and being able to express what you want to express. So I started making a web comic really early on, before any web comics were really web comics in 2002/2003. I was putting together these comics on my travel blog, I just put them up as part of it and the reaction I got was super positive. It was that moment where you kind of strike a nerve in yourself or someone else. It’s that moment where I was like ‘oh shit this is working.’ Whatever I am doing is working because I started getting emails and people were posting it and talking about it in the news and stuff. People were like “Go check this out”; it was the first time anyone gave a shit about what I was doing besides me. And that was massive, that was the kind of touch down moment where I was like I can do this. I can make whatever I want to make and maybe people will be interested. I don’t think before I really knew or cared if people would be interested, but at that point I was like oh yeah this can work!

**How do you find your clients? Has this process changed since you started out?**

Yeah well two fold, like the first thing is that I was just saying the industry has changed radically in the last 10 years because the young talent is at a higher level than they used to be. Like you got a lot of young people entering the illustration industry that have a higher level of skill than they ever had before. And that’s because of things like Tumblr and the internet, so now if you’re talking about the illustration industry art directors have a lot more choices, a lot more interesting styles, that’s a good thing generally for illustration, it’s just better, you’re going to see better work wherever you look.

Then on the flip side for myself I’ve gotten more and more comfortable in the industry knowing that I have something strong to offer. You know I’m at that point where I don’t need clients as much as they may need me, that weird sort of relationship as you get a little more comfortable in the industry you think now I'm more comfortable demanding basic levels of pay and basic levels of respect and saying ‘no’ to things. There's a tipping point at some point in your career what you say no to is more important than what you say ‘yes’ to. When I was a young illustrator I’d say ‘yes’ to everything, even stuff I hate and stuff that I’m like this isn’t me, this isn’t fun, this isn’t something I would even want to read or look at myself. But then at some point in your career like five years/seven years in, you have to stop saying ‘yes’. I mean I think the greatest artists have enough money that they don't have to say ‘yes’ to these things. That's what young artists are; they have enough money that many can say ‘no’ immediately. So now I'm finally at that point that I don't have to say yes to anything anymore that I don't endorse. And to the point where it pushes me out of the industry then it’s their loss. I’m not going to sell out 5% anymore; I’m just going to do what I want to do. What happens when you say ‘yes’ to the stuff you don't want to do, you put it out and you get the inevitable reviews that you would give yourself. Like oh this is a weak story or this is a weak representation, I make those choices because I’m not told to but because I wanted to, you know those compromises because the art director told me to. So it compounds that sort of anger; me as an artist, you make a lot of sacrifices to be an artist and just for an art director to ask you to make more sacrifices and say ‘no make it more colourful, make it louder, no make it so children like it.’ Don’t condescend to children, I don’t want to make any compromises anymore. So my attitude has changed and the industry has changed and they have both changed in the same direction where I should be getting a lot less work, so who knows. I mean maybe I won’t get any more work and will be working at a café near you. The ability to say ‘no’ to work is based on a financial ability, that's not an ability that comes from integrity, I think that's a myth. I'm someone that had to work doing odd jobs for 10 years to become an artist. And the ability to say no is something that I had to build financially and sort of creatively within the industry. Now I get to say no more and there are a lot more brilliant artists out there. And it's weird because clients will be like well you kind of need us, you can tell they have got that leverage on you but actually you don't need them because if you wanted stability and money then go work in a bank. I’m a pretty smart person, I can do really well in the financial sector but I make the sacrifices because I don't want to make those decisions based on what other people have to tell me. Generally the industry would be well served if it had more respect for themselves and for the amount of money they deserve.

**Which illustrators do you admire (both current and past)?**

One of the guys that got me into comics when I was in Korea was this guy Tom Herpich and he's been like a hero of mine, he’s amazing. And someone also who for many more years was working as a sushi chef, wait I think it was a sushi waiter, he was just trying to get by while he made his art. And he is now one of the main writers on Adventure Time and the whole style of that show is based on his style and people are pretty open about that, I think they mention it in that ‘Art of Ooo’ book. Anyway he's an amazing artist who is hugely influential to me and to this day is that kind of artist who has never given a shit about money and his integrity comes first. He has such an honest relationship with his art. Other artists like Dave Cooper, obviously Miyazaki as he is like a huge influence on everyone. Dave Cooper is a Canadian artist and cartoonist/graphic novelist I loved and Jordan Crane is an amazing comic book artist that really got me into doing comics. I was brought up in England and I was super into British comics, like Beano and Dan Dare when I was like five, so yeah like across the range, a lot of indie comic artists.

**How important is blogging about your work, for you, and for your fans?**

I posted my comic on my blog when I first started and I got that great reaction. So I'm probably stuck in gear, I used to say whatever good things have come my way have come from my blog. Now I just use Tumblr as a blog, it completely replaces all that marketing artists had to do, you just put yourself on Tumblr/or your blog and don’t even have to worry, people will come to you, if it's any good and just keep working until your stuff is good, eventually everyone, stuff will be good so you just have to keep going, if you have a little bit a taste. Or even if you don't people will love what you do. So yeah you should just keep posting stuff on your blog and maybe that's like a weird instinct that has been beaten into me but yeah I think the blog is really important. I haven't applied for a job in like 15 years it has all just come through the website and blog. I know on Adventure Time I hired a few people on that show and I was just like I don't care about your resume, I'll just looking at Tumblr and I'll know in the first five images if it was worth asking you to apply.

**Considering your connection to Adventure Time, would you consider your prints of the show drawn in your own style as forms of fan art?**

Oh interesting, no. I don't do fan art, I don't believe in fan art, no what do you mean? Like the Adventure Time stuff? Not at all, I only did that stuff because I was working on the show. I felt weird even doing it then, like I was just doing it because I need to get into this gear, I have a weird relationship with this whole idea of fandom at all. I think fandom is a form of consumption and it’s as creators something we should be very wary of. It's like identifying yourself by what you consume and it's something that we should all be very aware of. And it feels weird to even identify myself with the show even though I worked on it for two years. And I put in everything into the show for two years, so on some level I have to come to terms with that, it's fine, it is a part of what I've done. But no it wasn't fan art and I don't know what role fan art even plays, even when I see great fan art I'm like maybe I should investigate this artist further, but it never is an end in itself. I don't split hairs or take anything too seriously, but I don't know, I guess that is who I am.

**Do you feel you have ownership of your work on Adventure Time working as such a large team for Cartoon Network?**

No, that was an interesting experience because it's not done with any ownership over it, as a character designer you serve in the storyboard because the show is a storyboard driven show. So as soon as anyone signs on to the show you are working for the storyboard artist and I was kind of cool with that, because I've always loved that kind of thing. The thing about this kind of work is that when it fails, it fails in an interesting way because it's the voice or the vision of one person or a couple people. The problem when something that fails is when everyone tries to get involved and gets their own ego involved, it starts to look a mess. So I think even when Adventure Time fails because it is so loyal to its story boarders’ work, I think it's still good because it's honest. So to me it was never about ownership, for me as soon as I started work on the show and to the day I left I just put my sort of ego and identity to the back seat and just did my best to fulfill whatever that storyboard artist was going for. I would often go to them and be like what exactly were you thinking on this kind of thing, what do you want to see here, what do you have in mind for this. This show is very much about the story boarders’ work and I think that's what made it succeed and so I was totally on board with that.

**How do you feel seeing your work as printed/published pieces in major magazines, websites, comics and TV?**

I just love books, I love the artifact, I love the technology of books I think they’re beautiful and it's always thrilling, you know if the book works out the way you want it to, it’s a thrill. And with Drawn and Quarterly who is my main publisher the books are beautiful and I'm super proud of those books. And the way they look and feel when they come in it's like, I don't know giving birth to a child, I don’t have any kids so this is the closest thing to it, it's a pathetic analogy, but honestly it means a lot to me, to hold a book that was made the way that we wanted to make it. But when it's not made the way I want to make it it's like you want to throw yourself off a tall building. I’m just dramatic about it, you spend years on these things and done right it’s amazing. And when you're in a publication that you respect and admire its awesome, something like the New York Times or other places. As for working on Adventure Time, I guess I felt like I had no ownership on the show so it feels weird seeing it. And it came with so many challenges and constraints that it feels weird watching those episodes, but yet I'm super proud to have been part that.

**What are you working on currently, any exciting projects in the pipeline?**

I just finished some concept art for a show on Nickelodeon, which is maybe my last animation commitment, I’m not sure I’m a good fit with the animation industry. And I’m also working on another book, a graphic novel for Drawn and Quarterly, more of a travelogue, I did a trip on the Trans-Siberian railway years ago and I've been trying to put that into a book for ages, so hopefully now is the time, we'll see.

**Do you have any advice for art students that are about to embark on their own creative career paths?**

Think you are more important than the clients are, is the best advice. Like if you are going to work in illustration or commercial arts you will be asked to work on things all the time that don’t reflect on what you want to do. But what your instinct is, is more important than what their instinct is. And ultimately when I look back on all the mistakes I made and all the failures and all the little minor successes, all the things I've done that I really want to do and was really excited to do and was having fun doing, those were the things that turned out great. And things where I felt like I was compromising and doing something not me, often they will recognise what they were which was compromises and doing something for someone else. So really just try and find the space and I know it's tough to actually find the space and time to do what you want to do but that is the stuff that is most rewarding as an artist. And that's the reason we make the huge sacrifices we make as artists, is to do those things that we want to do. I would say that you are more important than them, that is one of the main lessons I've learnt.