

# studio spoken

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FEBRUARY 12, 2013



**Name:** Nick Naber

**Studio Location:** Staten Island, NY

**Practice:** Drawing & Painting, occasionally other media

**Website:** [nicknaber.com](http://nicknaber.com)

**Please give a breif bio. (Where are you from? How did you start? Is your background in art?)**

I grew up in Wisconsin, about 40 miles from Milwaukee. I was always drawing and painting the things around me as a child. It was a way for me to be independent, a way of creating my own world through art making.

When I went to college, I first thought I wanted to be an architect because of my love of architecture. When I took one studio course, I instantly knew that it wasn't for me. I was more interested in the fantasy than making things stand upright. I went on to get my BFA in Painting and Drawing at The Peck School of the Arts, and later my MFA in Painting and Drawing from the Pratt Institute.

**What continues to inspire you and keep you motivated in the studio?**

Since moving from BedStuy to Staten Island, I find myself drawn more and more towards shipping buildings, industrial equipment, and the boats peppering the harbor. I've started finding the oddities while exploring my neighborhood.

Exhibitions continually inspire me. Even if I don't find certain work especially compelling, it always works its way into my psyche on a subconscious level. Seeing exhibitions motivates me to work in my studio, even if I'm stuck.

## **How do you work physically?**

I tend to start off with sketching or photographing things that catch my eye. I take tons of notes. I will then draw multiple preliminary drawings, sometimes detailed, or sometimes just larger sketches, usually on bristol paper. Eventually I move to a finer paper, with my drafting tools and drafting table. They aid in capturing the allusions to architecture I want to evoke, and the exactness of architectural drafting. My drawings are not perfect, and that's important for me. I enjoy the overdrawn, heavy, and erased lines that build on the surface of the work. Like a palimpsest, they show its history.

My paintings begin the same way. With the paintings, however, I work on the ground, with the canvas on my lap. I like to be very close to it to have a lot of control over the paint and brush. These works look straight edged from a distance, but my hand is evidenced when you get closer. Once that physicality is seen, the illusion of taped, pristine lines dissolves.

## **What do you find frustrating/ enjoy about your process?**

I work in an ordered way. It becomes a sort of system. At times this is great, because I can create a large body of work while working in the system and innovating within my sets of rules for each. But, at the same time, It can be incredibly frustrating when the work begins to change, because I am used to a certain way of working. That's when I think it's good to loosen up and change medias, subject matter, or even just draw a still life to get my head in the right space.

## **What is your medium/ media of choice? Why?**

I have mostly identified myself as a drawer. I do paint, but I would never call myself a master of that craft. I love drawing because of its infinite possibilities. Drawing allows me to be freer in my expression than painting, photography, installation or video. It is also a medium that I have been using since I was a kid. It is a meditative, transformative experience to draw.

## **How has your practice evolved over the years?**

In many ways, much of my practice is the same as it was 6 years ago. I tend to latch onto a specific place or idea and work from it. That being said, I make a lot more work that I ever did. Earlier on I was always worried about having a "finished" piece when I was done with a work. I thought that it had to be perfect every time. I am much more at ease now. I make a lot of drawings I would consider a failure, a lot of bad paintings, too. I have finally gotten to a point where I learn from each of these failures. I think through this failure comes the better idea, the more confident stroke, or the precise line.

I have also become less agitated when I'm not in my studio making work. I now think of my time outside of my studio as studio time. In this way that I am constantly observing and digesting visual information around me, and putting it to use in my work later.

## **Tell us about your creative and conceptual process. Where do your ideas come from/relate to?**

My creative process starts when I am attracted to something — in most instances, architecture. I have this fascination with physical habitable space. I wonder what the inside of each building looks like, the things the structure has witnessed, and the lives that have come and gone.

## **Who/ what motivates and influences your work and why?**

Conceptually, I am interested in ideas or feelings that have a direct link to our built environment: gentrification, power structures, ideas of homosexuality, prison planning, and loneliness. I build out of these ideas and observations through drawing. It can be a long process before the visual and the conceptual come together and form a cohesive work.

## **How do you think/ want people to respond to your work?**

I would like people to respond to my work in a way that keeps the work open. I don't want one response to it, because I think it is more interesting when people take their time with the work and think about how their own life and experience influences how they see the work. It is my job to make them see those things.

**What was the last show you saw that knocked your socks off?**

*Picasso Black & White* at the Guggenheim Museum. I don't usually find myself in awe of Picasso because I already know his greatness. This exhibition, however, really drove home the fact that he is an absolute master of his craft. Even if it is a "bad" Picasso, the work is still amazing in its skill and execution.

Daniel Buren at Bortolami was a confounding exhibition. I don't know how vertical stripes in various colors and lights has stuck with me for so long, but it has. I think it's the way he implies architecture without the traditional "form" of architecture. I don't necessarily love it, but is seeping into my consciousness.

**Current adventures/ future plans? What's next?**

My current adventure is making a new body of work. I have been making tons of bad drawings lately and loving every minute of it. I am working through a bloc in the studio, which is frustrating but necessary. It's important to fail, because it means something new and better is on the horizon.

**Any advice to other artists? What is the best piece of advice you have been given?**

The best advice I was ever given was not to let the little voice in your head tell you that you can't do something. Just do it and see where it leads you.