



All art work by KEELY POI MAJEWSKI





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IN THE COMFORT SOME

interview & written by HANNAH ROSE PRENDERGAST

Born in the Sunshine State as a 90s baby, Keely 'Poi' Majewski knew early on that art was her safe space. Creativity runs in the family, their influence fused with, among others, dolls that didn't exactly break down doors and reading fashion magazines as gospel. Today, the 3D and digital illustration artist takes on the attitude and confidence of every character she creates;

the process is very cathartic. Able to handle whatever comes her way, Keely sees flip sides and silver linings like no other. Music, too, remains steadfast, whether she's listening to a new album or making art for it. You may recognize her work from the cover of Ice Spice's 'Like...?', but Keely's action figures can be anyone, as long as you're comfortable.

How is it living in Florida?

A lot of people are surprised that I live here, but I grew up here. I lived in California for a little while. It was right when I got out of high school, and I was like, I need to get away from here. I moved back to be around my family, especially my grandma. I'm right down the street from them. It's not my favorite place in terms of the social climate. I'm lucky enough that I'm very much a homebody, so I don't necessarily interact with it on a daily basis. Long term, I do see myself moving. There is a tiny community around the local area pushing to make a difference, mainly when it comes to visual art. I think there needs to be more of that.

What do you do by day?

I have mixed feelings about it. I'd love to do art 24/7, but I worry about security. I feel like that plays into a lot of things growing up. Making sure I'm secure for myself is huge. I prefer to be [at home]; that's where I create. It's comfortable for me. Living those two different lives and having to go to a day job is not always the best, but I'm thankful for it. It's important not to ignore that part of your life and find the good things in it, even if it's not something you want to do every day. I work at a community center, so I interact with many different people. Being involved keeps me aware of what's happening. In this environment, it's crucial to see the other side of the coin with people who are struggling and reaching out for help.

You come from a long line of creatives; how does your family continue to inspire you?

I was born into a family of divorce, and it was difficult. It was hostile, everybody fighting for custody. Dealing with that my whole life and seeing the creative side of the people involved was a relatable yet unique experience. Their creativity connected me to them amidst all the chaos of what was going on. Art has always been there and was such a bonding experience between my dad and me. We'd make portraits all day. It was a really good time in a not-so-great period in my life. His work was very realistic, so having that as a foundation from a technical standpoint was helpful. My mom was also constantly pushing me to keep going, and I did. Her connection to fashion design, hair styling, and modeling in hair shows was a steady influence; even now, she's always creating new clothes at the sewing

machine or altering things to fit her unique style. Overall, encouragement was the biggest thing for me. I was never told that something didn't look good or to do it again.

Fashion and art have always gone hand in hand for you. What was it like being a young girl looking up to fashion magazines for inspiration? I thought the models were beautiful, and I wanted to emulate that in my art. I wanted my art to be beautiful, but at the same time, I feel like there's a disconnect because I've always been a heavier kid or plus-size.

I didn't want to be [a model], but I thought that was the epitome of beauty. It's so strange as a kid to see that, and I think that contributed to self-image issues, especially when you're spending hours looking at and drawing it. I have mixed emotions about it. I have fond memories. I recently found a sketchbook with drawings of dresses from early 2000s prom magazines. I loved drawing those dresses; it wasn't so much about the models, but they were always skinny. I wish I had other things to look at and draw as a kid.

Did you ever think about being a fashion designer?

Not really, at least not that I can remember. I was so hyper-focused on art when I was younger. It would occasionally change as the years went on, like a chef or marine biologist. I would go full force into it; that's always been in my nature. It wasn't until adulthood that I thought maybe I could use my love of art for other things and branch out that way. When I revisited art after taking a break for so many years, it was almost like a new lease on life. There's so much that I can do now that I'm not holding myself back.

— Leave it to Vivienne Westwood, Alexander McQueen, Rick Owens, and who else?

I'm inspired by people in music and the clothing they wear. Tyler, The Creator's whole style and the fashion he designs are a huge inspiration. His personality and drive have been a beacon of light for me. That plays into people branching out from their original goal into other avenues of creativity. I love to see it. I love pushing myself and trying something new. I'm working on a few collaborative projects this year, and they involve fashion.

Before teaching yourself 3D art, you worked as a music journalist. Do you feel equally comfortable in both roles?

It’s been a few years since I’ve done music journalism, but that was the peak time that I started to branch out and realize I could do multiple things and retain that creative energy towards it. I have so much love for writing and journalism. I think it’s very important and goes hand in hand with the creative aspect. So the love is definitely there even if I’m not still doing it. Music plays a major part in my art. I always have to have something on. I’m always looking for new artists. It feels like [music, fashion, and art] are all present in my mind when making something. Growing up, I was told not to spread myself too thin, so I’ve forever had a fear of that and being able to find that balance while focusing on the visual aspect. Being able to represent all of those things at once is the goal when it comes to my work.

Art helps you cope with anxiety, depression, and chronic pain. How is your journey with that?

It’s still a struggle. I deal with depression every day, so there are ups and downs to that. Art has been there for me; family has been my support system, so I’m very thankful. It’s something I’ve had to learn how to co-exist with. A lot of the chronic pain is related to women’s health.

I wish more attention were given to that in the medical world so there could be help for people because pushing past that every day is tiring. My art has grounded me, but it’s also distracted me from everything I’ve had to deal with.

Is that why your BBs look unbreakable?

It’s the attitude I want to see in myself. I don’t always feel like that, but I strive to have the attitude and confidence that you can’t mess with me and nothing can bring me down.

„I want everybody to enjoy themselves and feel like they’re seen, even if it’s only an aspect.“

That’s why my work has a similar emotion in that regard. Being able to see myself in some of the characters, and when I do self-portraits, being able to depict myself with that toughness translates into real life; it reminds me that I can do anything.

Posting on IG has been a daily ritual; how do you not measure self-worth based solely on productivity?

I pulled back on the daily posting this year and some last year to give more time to pieces. I feel like I had to do that for myself, and I want what I put out to be the quality I’m happy with. It was worth it. I have such an issue with [procrastination].

I sit down, try to clear my mind, and just do it. The few years I did post every day drove the importance of self-discipline. It’s carried me on and got me through lots of stressful, high-pressure projects.

Who is your audience?

My audience is very diverse; it’s been surprising. It’s a comfort that so many people from different worlds and walks of life can relate. People get different meanings out of it, which is great, even if somebody doesn’t like it. As a queer person, I love that other queer people are drawn to my work. I think it’s so awesome that people are captivated without labeling it; they can relate to it, and we’re all vibing with that. We all get it.

Do you think it’s necessary today to have a coming-out story?

Coming out stories and publicizing them are vital. It shows people they can do it, too, and it’ll be okay, even if it doesn’t go well. Stories that aren’t positive deserve to have a place and be heard in today’s climate. It’s scary; a lot of people feel unsafe. People made assumptions when I was younger, and their assumptions were right! I really didn’t have a reason to deny it. I went to an art-centric school, so there were a lot of young queer people trying to figure themselves out.

I didn’t exactly have that moment for myself, but I don’t wish it was different. I remember feeling relieved it was over because people were already talking. I do wonder what it would’ve been like coming out to friends.

How was it dipping your toes into NFTs?

I didn’t know much about it at first, and I was excited to have an opportunity presented as world-changing. As I learned more, I discovered that was not the case, and I stepped away quickly. It was not for me.

What does it mean to be credited properly as an artist?

Artists deserve to be credited. It’s people’s livelihoods, especially today when it’s hard to make a living in the creative field and exist without other means of support. People have so much drive and creativity, which plays a part in getting other things out there; it’s a collaborative effort.

You have to decide how much you’re willing to put up with. It’s hard to do when you have strong opinions, but I want to be able to support my family and buy groceries. The amount of support I have received makes me emotional, knowing that people are willing to stand up for what they think is right, too.

What does the word ‘trance’ mean to you?

I love translating my perception of a publication’s aesthetic. I really want to push that and have a continuous

story between the characters, almost as if they exist together. I get into a trance with my art. I stress out a lot, and art keeps me honed in on being in the moment, so I wanted to play off that. People often think being in a trance is negative, but it could also mean you are very focused and headed toward a goal.

‘Poi’ translates to “apparently” or “seems like” in Japanese. It makes me think of how lifelike your characters are. Do you think it’s fated?

It’s funny how things turn out like that. I can certainly see the connection. [Poi] was the name of an old Tumblr blog I had as a teenager. It came from nothing; I just like short little words and how they looked together. Maybe it was subconscious because my mom had the nickname Pook or Pookie for me growing up, so having a name that starts with P has been ingrained in me.

— What’s the best way to bring them to life?

[Sculpture] is something I’d love to do in the future, just bridging that gap between existing in the digital world and real life. I feel that sculpture and large forms would be the best way to present my characters in the real world. I don’t really have experience in sculpture, so that’s something that I’d like to look into.

Why does art not have to disturb the comfortable?

It plays into being influenced by magazines; everybody looks a certain way, and I feel like I’ve always known I wanted to make art for people, and they can do with it what they will. I want everybody to enjoy themselves and feel like they’re seen, even if it’s only an aspect. I think that’s important, especially not having that as a kid. So many other people deal with being under-represented in the media at a higher level.

People always tweet me and comment, “This is so me.” It makes me happy that people see themselves and are fulfilled by that.