

Ode to the Hobby

A Note about Hobbies

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I believe an important factor in the human experience is the ability to pursue hobbies. Hobbies create purpose by providing healthy objectives to work towards and gain achievement from. In a society where most waking hours are spent providing labor, the freedom to engage in a hobby offers otherwise stolen peace of mind and “play” time. Hobbies are special, prized activities that give a reason to wake up in the morning. They shape individual character and personality.

I am interested in investigating human purpose through this form of leisure. By exploring the hobbies of others, I intend to uncover untold stories about purpose and passion to visualize the often discounted importance of hobbies in everyday life.

Jared Poulsen



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Cole

Plant Parent
Tattoo Enthusiast
Craftsperson

Leaving their small town in Connecticut to move to New York City in 2019 was a drastic change in Cole's life, but certainly a freeing one. Finding a community of other non-binary and lesbian friends helped Cole rekindle their love for crafting as well as gain inspiration for tattoos, body modifications, and collecting plants. Cole sees skin as an opportunity to display artwork and enjoys the process of tattooing to take agency over their body and express themselves to the world in a way that affirms their gender identity.







“It doesn’t feel serious because it’s a very hands-on accessible type of art. I enjoy the process.”



What has been your your longest running hobby?

I would say crafting, for sure. I have been doing it since I was a kid and just evolving it into different types of craft.

Why is it important to you now to keep crafting?

I think it’s the main way that I express creativity and can just mess around with stuff for fun. It doesn’t feel serious because it’s a very hands-on accessible type of art. I enjoy the process. And it’s also nice having an end result that I can wear daily and create cheap accessories that I’m not finding anywhere else, I can make exactly what I want. I can make exactly what my friends want.

What kind of stuff do you craft?

In the last year it’s mostly been jewelry based, especially hand stamping. And that’s usually focused on either being gay or being trans.

How has moving to New York changed your crafting hobby?

Moving to New York meant no longer having a collection of all different craft supplies, for example, a ton of yarn that I can always come back to and use to pick up a new hobby whenever. So it meant only keeping certain supplies with me and being more thoughtful. I’ve had to spend more money because I don’t a big backup of stuff. I wait until I specifically know something I want to do and then buy the supplies for it. It’s more intentional and makes it a little bit harder to just pick up a new craft.

Moving has also led me in different directions, such as with the jewelry, and I’ve definitely met people that have influenced me. My partner makes jewelry. So when we met, we were both doing that, and that was very fun and inspiring. And also just being around so many people like myself, having so many friends that are gay and trans gives me lots of ideas.



You've mentioned that part of your process is finding and collecting things and then incorporating them into your craft.

Oh, that's true for sure. If I see stuff on the street that I can use, I take it. Like rubber bands. Soda tabs are also something I started collecting and didn't really know why or what I wanted to do with them. I had some ideas of wanting to make a shirt or just different wearables and needing a lot of tabs so I asked people in my life to pick them up if they saw them. I ended up incorporating those into jewelry. I also started finding carabiners on the ground, which is kind of a meme for lesbians, having carabiners. So I was picking them up just because it was funny. Why not have more? And then I realized I could put them in my ears, which is a really cool way of flagging that I'm gay which gets noticed a lot. And then friends started wanting similar ones, but they don't have stretched ears, so I was attaching earring posts to them and stuff. It's cool. It feels very much like a lesbian thing.



“It feels good to take up that space, make myself be seen in that way, and be these people’s exposure to people that aren’t represented that much within the community.”

Are there similarities between how your jewelry practice and body mods help you express your identity?

Yeah, for sure. I've been interested in body mods and trying to be part of body mod communities since I was a kid. Part of how I got to know New York was coming in for trans healthcare since I was like 13, or 14 and then at 18, coming in for tattoos and piercings. I was really interested in body modification as a way to give me an aesthetic I wanted and have a presence in the world that I wanted and had crafted. I had a specific image in mind and body modification felt like a way to help me access some ideas of masculinity, neutrality, alternativeness, and offensiveness to certain groups of people.

Also the act of getting tattoos is a process I really love. It makes me very excited. It's fun to be in a community that's traditionally male dominated and full of really shitty people and take up space as someone who's not a man or someone who's non-binary, who's trans, who's gay and offend all these traditional people in this community. It's cool to be in a room

with a bunch of straight cis men and be this non-binary dyke that they don't really know what box to put in, which doesn't matter because my idea is really sick and they like tattooing me and we can still have a good conversation. It feels good to take up that space, make myself be seen in that way, and be these people's exposure to people that aren't represented that much within the community.

It feels like I'm doing something that's off limits and meant only for the men. Or as if I'm supposed to be a woman and the women aren't supposed to get tattooed, or these aren't the types of tattoos women are supposed to get. I'm getting very traditionally masculine tattoos, American traditional tattoos, and there is no way an American traditional tattoo artist is going to be upset about giving me this type of tattoo because it's a really fucking good tattoo. So, yeah, it's just a fun experience. It feels very affirming to my gender and feels like a cool thing I get to do. I get to be like, “Yeah, fuck you, bro. I'm here too. I'm doing the same damn thing.”







How do plants play into your array of hobbies?

When I moved to New York in 2019, I started collecting more and more plants, and really learning about plants and getting good at it.

What do you enjoy about having plants?

It's obviously nice to be surrounded by pretty things, but I really love taking care of my plants and noticing every little change. Knowing how to help them if they're doing poorly, knowing why, and seeing them thrive and have babies. I really like propagating plants and creating all these new big plants eventually from what was originally just a tiny little portion of a plant.

I also really got into trading plants with other people in New York, which I think, especially during quarantine, was a fun and pretty safe activity to do outside. Just quickly swapping plants was a way to not spend money and get all this cool new stuff for plants that I really wasn't caring about anymore. But other people were really hyped to get them. It's just a really cool experience and something I started doing a lot during COVID.

Trading plants seems like a part of New York culture.

It's cool and people are interested in it because we have such small spaces and it's a way to make it your own and your space not feel so closed off. But also, there's so many people, so it's pretty easy to get groups that have a lot of people to where you can really be trading plants and find very specific rare plants. So it's just really fun and a perfect situation. A lot of people will be really excited and ask me about the plants and tell me about the plants they're giving me. It's nice to know the story behind the plant. It's a fun moment to connect with a stranger that maybe you'll never see again.



Do you think there's any underlying connection between all of your hobbies?

I think they kind of all go together in forms of collecting. Collecting plants, tattoos, piercings, body mods, and things on the street for jewelry. And I'm also turning one thing into a bigger thing: growing a plant or making a new offspring of it. Turning trash into jewelry. Turning blank skin into a really cool piece of work that changes how I come off in the world. And then I think the jewelry side of my crafts and my body mods collect a lot because it's a way to express my gender and change things about me or choose exactly how I want to come off and choose how strangers are going to see me, how I'm going to take up space in the world and to be able to be really authentic to myself and make that happen. It feels very DIY and nontraditional because it's not going through traditional routes of transition with hormones or surgeries, other than top surgery, which also feels related to body mods.

My decision to have top surgery wasn't solely about the discomfort I was experiencing within my body with the chest that I had, but also just really wanting this aesthetic of a flat chest and not wanting a chest that looks the same as a cis man's. I wanted to have these scars across my chest as an identifier of being trans to people who know about it, but to have something about my body that is different than a cis person's, even if they think I just had surgery for some other medical reason and have no idea that I'm trans. I've chosen to mark my body to be different from theirs.

It's also a way that I can take agency over my own body in a world that thinks I should be a very certain type of way and that they should control my body and legislate it. But also just having had traumatic experiences growing up and as an adult where other people are doing things, you know, with my body, when it's my body, it's a way to kind of be like, "This is my body. I can do whatever the fuck I want with it." If I don't like it, it's my fucking fault. It is my decision. I specifically want to do stuff that I know you're going to think I'm weird and I'm going to put off the type of people that I want to put off and attract the type of people I want to attract without having to

say anything. If I pass someone on the street, they know what's up, they know I'm gay. They know I'm a dyke. They know I'm non-binary, if they're the same type of person. It's a very cool thing to be able to have and share with strangers that I'm not even talking to.

If you could make a living out of any of your hobbies, would you?

Yeah, absolutely. I think the easiest one to choose would be jewelry. It's something that I've tried to do, and I do sell stuff, but I don't have the capacity right now to try to turn that into an actual living. But I've also worked with plants before at a plant store, and that was great. I would also love to work at a tattoo studio in a reception or assistant position.

Do you think any fulfillment is lost by monetizing hobbies?

Yeah, I do. Which is something that I've been worried about as far as the jewelry that I make. So it's something that when I have the energy and I have ideas, I want to act on it. I make it and just have fun and sell it or give it away. And if friends have requests or birthdays coming up, I do a lot of stuff for that, but that's pretty infrequent. I'm trying to find a middle ground where if I'm having a lot of energy banging a bunch of stuff out then I can go to a craft fair or something and just sell there instead of trying to do this constant grind of packaging and mailing stuff.



**“This is my body.
I can do whatever
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If you had five extra hours each day, how would you spend them?

Ideally, I would spend doing recreational stuff and I think currently what that would mean for me is practicing new forms of art. I would really like to have a strong art foundation. I'm interested in drawing to figure out a lot of technical stuff and composition and then also painting to figure out those same things in a different medium. I'd like to learn color theory as well.

I'm also interested in building physical things with woodworking or throwing, but I don't want to take a one-off workshop. I want to really get to know the craft, which is very expensive. So do I try to spend a lot of money and energy on all these different crafts or just try to learn them with classes? Or do I pay probably the same amount of money in a college, not for the degree, but so I can get all the foundational information I want? Applying to schools and passing classes takes a lot of energy for someone who's not trying to be a full-time student. That would make it hard to have the freedom to explore for fun, let alone turning it into a living.

There are so many barriers and it's hard to figure out what direction you want to go if you have so many interests and don't really have the ability to play around with everything when you have a full-time job and you're paying the money for every single thing.



Type Note

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