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LENNY ADDORISIO

LOCAL ARTIST PAINTS THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT

Addorisio recalls the sleepier Key West, in which he got to know neighbors and visitors, keeping the store open as he painted into the night. "It was a groovy little place," he said. A groovy place driven by creative camaraderie.

"Back then there were a lot of personal stores in Key West. At least the whole bottom of Duval Street was working artists. You knew everybody."

Addorisio went on to own and operate The Rogue Rooster gallery, located on Petronia Street in what is now the indoor dining room of Blue Heaven. What began as a space to show his own work quickly evolved to include other local artists. Most recently, Addorisio owned Lenny's Space on Simonton. Addorisio has left the island at points – decamping for Asheville, San Francisco and Hawaii – but the community of Key West and the "light and color" he has found here continue to call him back.

A born artist, Addorisio grew up fascinated by the mastery of Michelangelo and the fearlessness of Vincent Van Gogh.

"Van Gogh is the epitome of an artist," he said. "His work is so so beautiful, and he did it when people were throwing rocks at him."

Addorisio also swam against the current. He came to Key West from New York by way of Fort Lauderdale, where he attended the Art Institute, studying graphic arts. Ultimately, the constraints of commercial art proved too tight: "I had to unlearn it all in a way. I had to find my voice and my freedom and my art. To just paint because I wanted to paint." Addorisio's departure from commercial art led him to custom furniture painting and, eventually, his own unmistakable aesthetic, "One day, I hand painted a big table and it kinda busted me open to my own style. I was painting like Keith Haring a little. I was painting like different people a little bit and then all of a sudden I was like 'ah, I can get my point across with my own style.'"

That style, inspired in part by the icon imagery of his Catholic childhood, was more brutal in its beginning stages. Addorisio recalls an inside joke with Beal.

"He used to say 'Lenny please just do like less bleeding heads' ... And that was the joke — 'less bleeding heads, dude, and you'll sell it.'" While there may be fewer bleeding heads now, there is no shortage of pain — or hope — in Addorisio's work, or an audience for it. He has exhibited his art locally at Lucky Street, Wooden Head, The Customs House, Key West Pottery and SALT Island Provisions, among others.

In 2014, Addorisio published "Reminders of Life," an illustrated meditation book born from the drawing-a-day social media practice he began the year before. Meant to be read at random, each page includes an original drawing by Addorisio accompanied by a proverb or poem, quote or verse that he loves or has learned from.

For an artist who finds so much power in words, many of Addorisio's pieces are untitled, leaving the work open to interpretation, at turns whimsical and disquieting. In his sunny home studio, a stone's throw from the cemetery, Addorisio's pieces reveal an affecting duality; blackbirds and blindfolds, lovers holding hands with empty flower boxes for hearts, angels and thorny roses, blue skies and barren trees.

For Addorisio, his paintings are not so much created as they are extracted.

"My pieces are already done inside of my head before I start painting," he said. "I just need to take them out of the ether and bring them here, to fruition."

His art is made to be shared and spread.

"I'm honored and blessed when someone wants to own a piece of my work. I love that it goes out into the world." And we, in the world, are lucky to receive it.

It's been 30 years since local artist Lenny Addorisio set course for Key West in a turquoise Chrysler New Yorker weighted with loose change and high hopes,

"We drove down the Keys in that car. We actually spent the night on the side of the road up the Keys because you were able to do that, to sleep out under the stars. We had no money; we had, like, rolls of nickels and that's how we did it."

With his partner and fellow artist Jeff Beal, Lenny opened Bohéem, a gallery and silk-screening shop on the 700 block of Duval in the winter of 1989. The pair took up temporary residence in the nearby Heartbreak Hotel, a den of intrigue and iniquity as Addorisio remembers. "We lived there for maybe \$70 a week; it was really a cool place, there were like porn stars living there, and the guy who ran it used to drive his dog around in a motorcycle, and downstairs was the Alligator Bookstore which was a sex bookstore, and my store was right next to it."



What's your full name; what is your nickname? Leonardo Addorisio. My nickname is Lenny or Boink 120

When did you realize you were an artist, or when did you start identifying as an artist? As a very young boy. I used to make Play-Doh sculptures and line them up. Also, when no one was looking I would melt crayons on the radiators in winter!!!!

Do you have a life credo or motto? Life is great ... even when it ain't.

How do you feel when you look at a blank canvas? Scared and hungry at the same time.

What's on your bucket list? So so much ... probably more time.

What is your idea of perfect happiness? Eating mangoes in the Hawaiian Islands with someone I love.

What is it that you most dislike? Entitlement. (I'm entitled to my opinion.)

Which TV, movie or super hero character is your alter ego? Always wanted to be Aquaman ... the original one!!

What role does the artist fill in society? To show the darkness and the light.

Name three things you could not live without. Pencil, paper, eraser... (maybe coffee).

If invisible, what would you do? Mmmmm can't say that one out loud.

On what occasion do you lie? I never lie.... Wait, I'm sorry, that's not true.

Favorite guilty pleasure? Eating lots of really cheap candy late at night.

What talent would you secretly love to have? To play the violin ... not really sure why.

What essential element of Key West do you think is changing/has changed in the time you've lived here? I've been here for a long time so I have seen soooo much change, especially as the world does ... but the one constant is our beautiful loving community!

Lunch with one famous person, whom would you choose? I can't choose so it would be between Patti Smith, Jesus and Michelangelo (probably in that order).

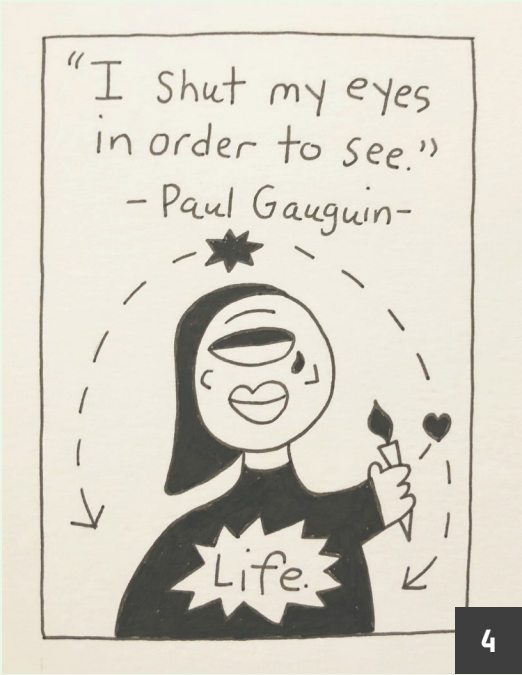
Finish these sentences:

My friends and family would describe me as ... Not really sure ... I guess you would have to ask them. I've always been a bit scared to ask!

1. Artist Lenny Addorisio on the porch of his home studio.

2 + 3. Paintings by Lenny Addorisio.

4. An excerpt from Addorisio's 2014 book, "Reminders of Life".



My autobiography would be titled ... Lenny was here

I can never refuse ... A woman with tears gets me every time.

When I go, I will go ... Peacefully and quietly...and a bit confused.