

Paint Until Dawn

Producer/Director Eli Ives

TEN FAQ QUESTIONS

1) What's so important about Hans Hofmann's school?

Hofmann opened one of the first schools of modern art in the world in 1915 in Munich. Despite poverty, oblivion, world wars and immigration, his ateliers in New York and Provincetown became a nexus of visual exploration for generations of students until 1958, inspiring a variety of art movements along with economic and cultural growth. The articulate legacy of the Hofmann school offers a conduit into the heart of the creative process, and our collective survival depends on creative thought.

2) What's so important about Hans Hofmann's teaching?

Hofmann was able to teach on an individual basis, without formulas and with infinite variation, concepts that he himself had absorbed through an exhaustive compositional study of the art of all eras. Hofmann himself only slowly became an abstract painter, as his color gradually became a structural force in the movement of the composition. But what he taught applied to all styles of painting.

3) Why a film on James Gahagan? Is this a biopic?

This isn't a biopic but a film about art. James Gahagan was Hofmann's right hand man in the last years of the school, his Associate Director, and one of the few able to explain Hofmann's critiques. Over decades of painting, he integrated what he'd learned from Hofmann into his own work. After teaching for many years, he's able to articulate challenging visual concepts.

4) Tell me more about the legalization of loft living.

The NYC Fire Department commenced widespread evictions of artists from lofts in the winter of 1961. Gahagan co-founded the Artists Tenants Association and became its first president. The threat of a strike by artists, along with input from the newly created Art Dealers Association, convinced Mayor Wagner to negotiate conditions for legal loft living, resulting in the AIR (Artist In Residence) designation.

5) Why films about white male artists?

White guys need role models: humble men of peace. These are films based in history and the Western art world was mostly white then, especially the artists involved in education. But there's more happening: earlier films about this era had to have gone out of their way to edit OUT the presence of women and LGBT. *Paint Until Dawn* suggests, without preaching about it, the unrecognized omnipresence of women in the art world: as students, as colleagues and partners, as teachers and organizers, and as artists.

6) What did you learn about directing?

Technique has to fuse with with interaction: start recording on a lav and a digital recorder immediately in case anyone starts talking. Don't turn the camera off until just before packing it up. Film everything that moves, especially impromptu hand gestures—set the frame to allow room for them. Sit the subject to gaze out the window just past the camera. The window will light the face, their expression will be less self-conscious once they have something else to look at besides a camera lens and a director, and the light makes eyes shine. Before we began his interview, photographer Gene Lesser showed me how to bounce a spot off the ceiling for more light.

The director elicits the story, more through listening than asking questions. The list of questions is only for when no one knows what to say. Photographs and letters stir memories (film them before leaving). A pet or partner can help people lighten up, but not alcohol—tension is magnetic.

7) What did you learn in the edit?

Cut to a temp track of the highest possible quality of whatever genre of music you'll be using. The multiple layers of musical rhythm will become embedded in the edit. When you later substitute the music you can afford, the film will actually make a somewhat annoying song more interesting. Let the material to find its best form through contrasts (that's Hofmann!), whether spatial, rhythmical, temporal, emotional, intellectual, etc.

8) Where do you see the future of docs heading?

Docs offer a way to explore ideas—if they aren't constrained structurally. Take liberties. Docs shouldn't be expected to follow a story arc or even have the look of narrative films. They shouldn't have to be limited to social concerns or biopics. There's no formula at any stage, beyond the act of listening—and learning to recognize the story as it emerges.

9) Who are your influences in film?

The greats: Satyajit Ray, Kurosawa, Werner Herzog, Zhang Yimou, Dziga Vertov, Federico Fellini, Martin Scorsese, Orson Welles, Ingmar Bergman, Charlie Chaplin, Frank Capra, Douglas Sirk, Jean Renoir, Michael Moore. And Bollywood, Tollywood!

10) Where was *Paint Until Dawn* filmed, and when?

During the shoot, the production was based in BC, so, repeated trips to the east coast (Vermont, Cape Cod, and Amherst MA) in the spring and fall of 2013. The little town of Collorgues in Provence, France, in June 2013. In November 2013 to Wickenburg AZ. New York City in March 2014; Los Angeles in June 2015. Back to Vermont in the fall of 2015. The edit began in BC, became homeless, reached rough cut in the mountains of Tamil Nadu, continued in a medieval village near Valencia, Spain, reached fine cut in a country town in the south of England, and found home and completion in Montreal.