

Jonathan Hoonhout
Commencement Speech

“Life is not a story, we make up stories to reassure ourselves; the experience of our lives is a collection of vivid moments.”

I tried to consolidate my four years at Cornish into some kind of narrative to share with you, only to find how true Friedrich’s statement is. All I have is a pile of moments, nothing is in the order of how they happened, the images are fuzzy around the edges and each memory reminds me of something completely unrelated. Some moments are vivid for obvious reasons while others are a mystery.

I remember how the sky looked from the window of my audition into the Theatre Department.

I remember discovering what an “overdraft” fee was.

And being put on probation.

Going to a party to see a girl I liked only to meet someone new, whom I would fall in love with down the road.

Ordering breakfast food at night.

Getting looks for running acting class on the street.

Having beers at Joe Bar during the summer.

Performing a Eugene O’Neill scene with Hank on a crowded bus.

Starting a water fight in a park fountain at two in the morning with French tourists.

Being the last to know a friend of mine back home had died.

I remember renting a cabin with my closest friends this past winter, knowing we would all be pursuing our ambitions around the country by the next winter.

Tomorrow is special.

Tomorrow, the excuse “I can’t, I’m in school” is null and void. Tomorrow no teacher or alarm clock will get any of us out of bed. Just our passion, the same passion we brought four years ago. So when you are preparing for a performance, or putting the touches on your portfolio, or picking the pieces for your new exhibit, the last thing one should think is:

“Can I really do this?”

“Did I put all of myself into this?”

“And if I did, what is left for the next time? And the time after that? And after that?”

All the accomplishments I have made and witnessed didn’t come from second guesses. Because art dwells in the same place life does. Moment to moment. And moments have no room for insecurity. Tomorrow we immerse back into a society that craves new artists like my roommate craves new Battle Star Galactica episodes.

In this era of individualism, of I phones, You tube, and My space; what place is left for the expressive artist?

I couldn't put it better than the playwright, Charles Mee, who said, "It is the living artist who articulates the stories, ideas and images that embody our lives and inspire our identities, values, and connections."

I think of Robert Rauschenberg, Anne Bogart, Mary Overlie, and John Cage, artists who articulate the world around them. These giants that we stand on. And yet, the society that we live in is constantly changing; new ideas, new experiences, new inventions, new cultures. None of which was available to these artists before us. And a moment will come when we are the giants with little art students on our shoulders.

We have all the craft and technique to explore this ever-evolving landscape of our world. The art world is like a Volkswagen Van, it can always fit one more.

Looking back on four years, these were these instances when my faculty reminded me of how often I hid in my head. I would try to control what would happen in my work. And I wonder now, how many moments have passed by? How many lessons, how many opportunities, how many relationships have I been oblivious to by hiding from these mysterious things, these moments? I could spend the next four years trying to orchestrate life and all I'll have is a pile of blank memories that should be filled with the unplanned and uncontrollable happenings of the now. That is the most valuable thing I will take with me.

Because Friedrich said, "Life is a series of vivid moments."

The only thing to do is reach for the next moment as it stampedes past us. Grasp it, rub it between your fingers and when some of life gets under your nails, get your brush, your script, your instrument and let it infect your work.