

Gonzalo Fuenmayor (MFA 04) Commencement Guest Speaker 2016

It is such privilege and honor to be here.

Congratulations to the class of 2016!

I am so happy to be part of the family of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and what a great moment to be here, in such an important inflexion point in its relationship with Tufts University.

12 years ago I was attending my commencement at SMFA. I am certain I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my family and their continuous support and love... so please, take a moment to look around, give a thumbs up, a love you mom, love you dad, love grandma, husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend... And be grateful to all the people who've been constantly by your side as part of your personal cheerleading squad; this is just the beginning...

When approached to make a commencement speech, two things crossed my mind: The first, I am getting old, and second, I am soooo under qualified. But this is a feeling I often have. Or have had. Am I talented enough? Am I prepared enough? Do I have what it takes to make it happen? Lots of questioning, lots of asking permission to the cosmic gods, to the world, to the wife, in order to speak up, make a move... Today there is noise, celebration, laughter, music; but tomorrow, once the dust settles, you'll probably ask yourself the same questions I am asking myself as I give this speech...

What am I going to do now? Am I good enough? Smart enough? Bold enough? Talented enough?

And yet here I am. In front of all of you. Taking a chance and telling my story. I am still figuring out how to make it. So giving a speech in front of you, doesn't mean I necessarily have a clear advantage. But, it may provide some perspective about what to embrace and what to focus on as you move forward with your life as an artist.

I came to pursue my MFA at Museum School in 2001. At a moment in time where specialization was championed, I came in with the sole purpose of becoming the best painter I could be. I wanted to talk exclusively about painting, have only painter friends, painting teachers, share obscure painting secrets about payne's grey or permanent rose, and breathe painting; Nevertheless, in my quest of becoming 'The Painter', I stumbled with a unique environment... not focused on specialization, but one which encouraged experimentation and a multidisciplinary, global approach to learning.

I struggled at first, or to be precise, I was thrown around in all directions; I flirted with video, installation, performance, drawing, and mixed media. Every day, I was

forced to redefine my comfort zone and in the process I expanded my vision of what art and myself could become. SMFA forced me to play an active role in what I wanted and needed to learn. I am now convinced education starts when one can identify what one needs to learn, regardless if it is within the Academic boundaries or not.

Be brave. It is so obvious, but so easily undermined. I started off as a business mayor, in spite of my interest and love in arts and literature. I pursued the comfort and shade of a tree which offered a false sense of security and stability, compromising my self esteem and happiness. I was irresponsible due to my lack of courage to take control of my life. After 3 years, I finally found the strength to quit and pursued a career in the Arts. Courage truly changed my life. It saved my life.

I believe pursuing a career in the Arts is an act of rebellion; a rebellion against fear, imposed social norms, disappointing family or other people expectations or financial uncertainty. The fact that you are sitting here, in this room, is a clear indication that you've swam against the current; that you've been brave; Einstein spoke about imagination being more important than knowledge; I think courage should be factored into the equation as well.

Fear and uncertainty will never disappear; hence, you'll need to continue evolving your courage. Make it a habit. It doesn't have to manifest itself in grand heroic deeds... but in recurring acts of bravery: rent a studio you barely can afford, travel to a different city, start a conversation with someone you admire, change your process, learn a new skill, whatever you think may impact your life and career. Be brave and give yourself permission to fail, to dream, to make, to create, to continue going amidst all the adversities...

Art school is about figuring out your own personal creative process. It goes further than developing a specific style, voice or coherent body of work; it is the consolidation of a thinking process, a set of made up rules that encourage a unique and personal interaction with the world.

Do not underestimate the power of these past years at Museum School or your creative process. Embrace the friendships you've made and the skills employed in establishing this system of values. While other graduates, in other fields have been trained with a specific set of skills which may have predestined paths... you have been trained to create the path. Why stop now?

A brief disclaimer - After graduating, I remember going through my own version of Art School/Grad school Detox period. Most likely you will go through something similar. Art school detox, is a right of passage where you assess life as a student, and life as an independent creator in the world. It is an adaptation process. What do you need to learn in order to survive in the real world? What do you need to unlearn? How will your creative process change? Regardless of the result, trust

your instincts and set of skills acquired in art school in order to keep inventing and transforming your creative process and life.

Finally, Say hello to your new –old- best friends: Failure and rejection. Become buddies. Success is a lousy teacher, but failure, oohhhh failure on the other hand, will be the most important mentor you will ever have. Embrace it, look at it in the eyes, hug it, and don't be scared of it. Treat it with respect. Be certain that with hard work and patience –like everything in life- the relationship will grow and evolve. You are really meant for each other. Have in mind failure and success only last about a week. After this, no one –not even yourself- will remember or even care.

Keep your eyes open, and find out what you need to learn from what's hidden in plain sight. Kindly tuck away all the “No's”, all the “we Regret to inform you's”, all the “It is with great sadness, bla bla bla”, kiss them good night, disregard them. Defy them, learn from them, be perseverant in making yourself better without letting them define who you are or who you will become.

Keep learning, the path is yours. Thank you.