

# **SEI MESI DI TERR, “SIX MONTHS OF ABSTRACT EARTH”**

Art Showing by David Lionheart at the Grit Gallery, 115 Broadway, Newburgh, NY 12550

**MM: AS YOU KNOW WE ARE HERE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR CRAFT, TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WHY AND WHERE YOU GET YOUR ARTISTIC INSPIRATION FROM?**

DL: I was suppressing things from my childhood, like the molestation, the loss of my brother, my father leaving, and the economic space we were living in. When I started **Play for Your Freedom** it made me feel really good to start that project and get to work on it but I still was not working on myself. Before I knew it six years went by from conception to our current environment which is dealing with large volumes of people who are in a really tough spot, in a very negative space themselves and I wanted to help all of them. I was working at 200% capacity and I had chosen to do that for my own reasons, I am able to be really effective at it and make a real difference in their lives. I started peeling back the layers of why do I identify with these people in some strange way not having served myself. I asked is there something else going on here? Something to do with losing my brother to suicide, and I started peeling back those layers, asking “how was I running this great organization, and not making healthy choices for myself during that time.”

For example, when we first started **Play for Your Freedom**, after a workshop we would celebrate by drinking beers, which is the opposite of what I was just talking to everybody in the room about. There is nothing wrong in moderation but that wasn't the best way to celebrate; I wasn't exercising the way I should have been; I wasn't making good choices for myself as I was traveling, running, going, and giving...over giving really, and now I can see that. I wouldn't change it because we are here to save lives first and foremost, but I had to think about how to do it long term.

This summer I had a really bad doctor's visit and I hadn't been to the doctor in a long time. I found out that I had some health issues that had to be addressed. I come from a family with a bad heart history, I was starting to show some of those symptoms. In college I had an episode during track and field, that I would describe as a heart attack based on what had happened. When I woke up that morning my heart was racing out of my chest as we were weightlifting. I told the coach, he put his hand on my chest and my heart was still racing, he said maybe you're already warmed up, just jump into the workout. At practice that afternoon it was still racing, and my coach said it still



looks like you're revved up from this morning, just take it easy. I did not. I got into the workout and I was already at peak heart rates and I was pushing hard. On the back turn of a 400m race I remember I could feel the arm pain and then saw nothing, I woke up on the way to the hospital. Needless to say, they took me out of sports after that. So I stopped running in college. That situation made me think twice about my last visit.

Fast forward to now and the stress was taking a toll on my heart and its function and now I know that. I stopped and knew I had to make a change right then and there. I told my team effective immediately I'm stepping away from **Play for your Freedom** for a month, just till I figure out what's going on. They would go on to carry the organization for that time in heroic fashion.



Shortly after the doctor's visit I had my 37th birthday and my wife bought me a work by Maria Lago called 'The Eighth Day' because she said that it reminded her of me. It's this being on this beautiful and colorful piece laying down with its hand over its head. The being is still holding its brush after it created something it's very proud of. It was very complex, very beautiful but very daunting. Now it's the eighth day and this being is laying there wondering what it should do. Should it revel in what it's done, should it walk away, should it get back up and continue to create? It's having this very serious contemplation. I went and saw the painting in person under her recommendation before we finalized the purchase. I didn't want to own it because my wife thought it was me laying there in this painting, I wanted to own it

in order to learn from it in how I was going to treat myself going forward. So we got this painting and I started reflecting on it and really studying it, and to the left was this blank wall space, we both agreed the wall space looked awkward and decided we should paint something to go here to compliment the new work. I raided all of my landlord paints and construction materials, raw burlaps from wrapping my grape vines and metals from my renovations. I went to the art store and I bought 10 canvases. I went home, locked myself outside, turned off my phone and I started to just create, paint and sculpt. At one point my wife came out and said, I like this one but this one looks entirely too gory! I said get out of here! This isn't for you! Meanwhile I was grinning from ear to ear because I was having so much fun. For 2 days straight I'd

wake up at three in the morning go outside and spray paint, sculpt, paint, create all day till it was dark, then go to bed and wake up at 3 AM and keep on doing it again and again. So, for the next seven months that's what I was doing, that's how I was creating. I made over 50 pieces that range from the 9' x 7' to 12' x 24'. I didn't stop, I just kept on having this process and these thoughts, "I'm a carpenter so I am skilled, right," I was really maximizing the use of materials and pushing the realm of possibility with different mediums. Asking what will happen when you mix these things? What happens when you do this to these metals? I was playing a lot with creating my own textiles and using earth material to develop these different texture panels and surfaces. I never had an idea of what I wanted to do, I just took these things and started doing something with them and that's what happened on the canvas. They were starting to be looked at by friends and family because I was constantly covered in paint and they were all over my house and my garage, you couldn't help but trip over the damn things.

I was sitting in my studio recently and just crying, I was sitting there and I was surrounded by this work, and I was looking around thinking "you are f\*cked up, like this is not normal," and I was just weeping. They were tears of hurt and joy because I hoped that if there's somebody else out there that is experiencing the same congestion, sitting in their basement, trapped. I hope that they find something that makes them happy and helps them deal with whatever is going on inside. I cracked open, and I'm thankful

that it happened and it's still happening, it's still coming out. I've created over 100 large format paintings since July of 2019. If I had not found art, all of that would still be inside me, every motion, every movement, every shade, every color, the placement, everything I'm creating, this world around me and all these things that it is still pouring out of me. It's slowed down a little bit, because it also needs to have control or else it will consume me. I knew that if I can take control of it, it would also help me take control of other things in my life. I had a building that burned down yesterday. As soon as I got the news the families were safe and my friend Ed to help me board the place up, I went home and painted. I was fine. I went to bed that night and I slept next to my son peacefully. Something is different now. I'm not a worrywart and am really focused on being at peace. My wife reacted as if it was the old me calling her to tell her about the fire. She said "it's going to be okay, everything's gonna be okay. We have insurance, the people are safe. Everything is fine." I just smiled and said I know it will be. The Old Dave I would have lost it. I was so defensive to her always, growing up in a single-parent home when my dad wasn't there when shit hit the fan, I took it hard, like I could have prevented it. Even though I was only 11,12,13, I was the one ripping the bathroom apart because we had no hot water for three months and no money to do anything about it because I felt it my responsibility to invoke change. I was the one helping mom under the trailer thawing the pipes out on freezing winter nights. The way I was reacting to something going

wrong was "it's my fault." What did I do wrong that I could've done better? When I started **Play for Your Freedom** and one of our vets killed himself, I was blown out like "why wasn't I better? What could I have done differently?" I didn't prepare myself mentally for that. Somebody needed help after I met him, and he seemed good, and then we lost him. I was hard on myself. It wasn't sustainable. I think what I'm interested in is a sustainable life, where I can help others and help myself at the same time. Creating art is doing that for me now. So that's the long answer to the why, that is why I'm doing it.

#### **MM: WHO'S HELPED YOU ALONG THE WAY?**

DL: Brian Wolfe was very instrumental in helping me gain some direction in what I was doing. If you've ever watched X-Men, Cyclops can shoot lasers out of his eyes, but when he takes off his glasses, there is nothing that can control them. They are just shooting everywhere and it's stressful. I was shooting lasers everywhere, and then Brian Wolfe came, and put on my glasses. And now I can shoot my lasers where and when I want to. Now my art is very intentional. Now I can express what I am trying to say, and I am putting thought and intention behind the emotion. This has maximized my art experience, while I am creating. It's given me a purpose and means to share a thought. Most importantly I want my son and other kids to know that they have art as a tool to express themselves at any age, and that it's a healthy way to do it. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. My childhood friend told

me that "it doesn't matter what the art is, it only matters that you brought it into existence." I am going to start hosting art classes for kids. I met a woman at my current exhibit in Grit Works, and she is going to help me set up the first one. I am going to do a mini presentation for the kids, give them some tools of the trade, and then give them the room to openly create and possibly heal. Art is a great place to learn discipline, respect for yourself, respect for other artists and live as an individual. This is only 8 months old, this thing whatever it is.

#### **MM: WHAT HAS THE FEEDBACK BEEN SO FAR? FROM YOUR FIRST ART GALLERY SHOWING AND YOUR FRIENDS?**

DL: It's the first time the art has left my house. Whenever you do that you are opening yourself up to criticism and compliment.



The love feels really good and the criticism is appreciated. I sold 10 pieces at my first show. I went into it not caring about the sales. I was more grateful that someone would let me hang my art in a public place. I did Newburgh open studios, Chapman Steamer Performance and hung in Studio 929, but this gallery opening was solely walking into David Lionheart and his mind. I love my art and now it's out there for someone else to enjoy. My art and I are still in the honeymoon phase and I hope it always feels that way. One of my collectors was having her father come to transport the piece. He immigrated to this country and worked hard as a tradesman; he is a gritty, old school dude. He walked in said, "my daughter showed me pictures of the art, but this is really beautiful." She told me her dad isn't an art person and your art really resonates with him and a lot of different people of all walks



and ages. I like to think that there is something for everyone in my collection. Some have a wild feel, some a little darker and then there are a lot of vibrant colorful images making you feel for the piece. I didn't have a lot of training. I took a couple art classes in college. I needed something simple to do with a hangover, i guess. I never studied art the way I could or

should have, and I don't think I want to. That is not what this is. My wife handles the business side of it for me so I can focus solely on creating. That is my strict relationship with it. I am having a second showing and I am going to replace the 10 pieces I sold with a new ten. The gallery said they have had a ton of foot traffic coming off the street, people drawn to the color and presentation.

The night before the opening, my best friends from all over the country traveled to attend. I had them come in the studio, I threw 5 canvases on the floor, we put some music on, and I started creating. I told them to put a poncho on, it's kind of like Sea World in here and everyone is going to get wet. I don't ever let anyone see that process, it's an intimate part of me, but they grew up with me and they saw me as a kid, to college, then to my organization Play for Your Freedom. Now I was standing in front of these new once blank canvases showing my best friends who I am now.

A proud experience at the opening was selling my art to strangers. It is amazing that someone who doesn't even know me can come in and feel something and want to hang it in their home. That was another part of the process I didn't understand. I had one woman who bought a painting say, "I don't have room to hang it yet, but I want my twin girls to get used to having it in the house." I didn't think about how children will grow up looking at this art. I received gratitude through my construction career, and now I am receiving it through my art. I want art to be a part of my full-time life.





## **MM: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR GENRE OR CATEGORY OF ART?**

DL: I would say mostly abstract. There are a couple of pieces that stand out in the collection. They have a distinct and clear message that I was intentionally trying to portray. There is one piece I am working on now that will be at a brand-new show that will allow me to deliver a whole new feel. The show hanging now is very jovial and colorful. But I have some really dark pieces. When I create one of those pieces there is a distinct character, setting, and emotion. I can't just start it and work straight through. So, I have flow pieces that are more abstract that I can work on in between while I work on this piece. I work on this large piece every day, but only for a short period of time. It's healthy for me to take a step back from it. Flow pieces keep my mind busy, the abstracts that come from the materials, colors are a hybrid of textures, color blends, and notable techniques. Some have a

Jackson Pollock style of technique, spreading the paint on the canvas in wild action and emotion through fluidity. And then there are some inspired by Anselm Kieffer, who is a German artist who reflects on the dark time in his country during the Holocaust, he makes works full of lead, and wood, and all these really interesting things. I like sculpting on the canvas, I want to create a presence in my works. I am a carpenter and I'm a pack rat, so I have an endless supply of cool stuff to sculpt with to contribute to that intriguing surface of the art. If I am not thrilled with the painting, I paint over top, there are several paintings over paintings over paintings. My flow pieces will make you feel what was going on with me at that moment vs. a constructed direct message that's found in my focus pieces.

The very first piece I created was called 'The process of Thought'. It's a giant head with these little tiny red people and the head is trying to explain to these little people that they need to keep thinking

for themselves because times are changing and you're not going to be able to think for yourself anymore. One person is looking the other way, one is looking down, and one is looking up. So, one is completely lost, one is in the middle, and one is saying hey maybe this guy is right, and we should think about continuing with free thought. For me, I have artists I study and submerge myself in, but overall, I have so much respect and admiration for all artists, because they are pushing forth the idea of free thought which is so important to have. When artists come together as a community, we can be an engine of energy that can't be stopped.

I am currently looking to work with designers who can place these larger collections into businesses and bigger residential spaces. We are using the new website [davidlionheart.art](http://davidlionheart.art) as a tool to get the works out there to the public. This journey is just getting started and I couldn't be more thankful for starting it.