

The figure painter Francis Bacon said, “The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.” This is a very good artist statement. It reminds us that questions are more important than answers and that the artist does not have the last word on the meaning of a work of art. For me, art is the place in our society to explore important questions, try out new ideas, and take part in an age-old conversation about fundamental human concerns such as beauty, truth, and spirit. Art is not a place to merely stay between the lines, or be hemmed in by tidy explanations or final answers. It is the one space where we can encounter unpopular, alternative, and inspiring ideas and explore them without regard for social conventions, making money, or other doctrines that structure our lives. This free space for art is what allows for contact with “the mystery.” As an artist, I aim to keep the mystery alive in my work as much as possible. This is reflected not only in the questions I ask, but also by keeping an open mind about how art can engage the world. This openness leads to new discoveries, new accidents, and further engagement with the questions.

There are many questions that I am interested in exploring with my work. Often they revolve around issues of consciousness: What do we notice? Where is our attention? How does attention influence memory? What do we know? What is right here in front of us, right now, that is being missed? As I approach these questions I consider the viewer. What role does the viewer play in creating meaning? How is the work open to him or her? How is it closed? Focusing on the viewer's perspective in this way is a key part of my artistic process. It helps me concentrate on creating experiences with my work that encourage viewers to become aware of their own assumptions, ideas, desires, and attention—the basic components of consciousness. At the same time, the particular details of a piece engage viewers with the questions I am exploring. Everyday objects and experiences, like buying ice cream, a cat eating, or boys having a conversation, ground the work in the familiar and thereby provide a connection to the viewer's own life. These mundane choices of subject matter also focus attention on what is sometimes taken for granted, while at the same time humor draws the viewer in and laughter provides a release from the weight of serious topics. Finally, keeping the mystery in the work reminds us that living can be a richer experience when we approach life naïvely.