

The S.B. Questionnaire: Frederick Janka

Talking Artistic Power with the Development Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art



Paul Wellman

Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara director of development Frederick Janka

Story by Roger Durling

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“Art is a powerful tool for change,” says the emphatic Frederick “Freddie” Janka, director of development at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (MCA). He comes across as an introvert at first, but don’t be fooled: Freddie is an outspoken advocate for art. “Now more than ever,” explains Freddie with passion in reference to the presidential election, “now is the time that artists thrive. They’re at the forefront of social change. They’re the leaders.”

Freddie was born and raised in Santa Barbara, but was compelled to leave and experience the world and art beyond the American Riviera. “I couldn’t wait to get out of here,” he divulges. So he studied art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and then became curator of an art gallery in Mexico City. “I wanted to work at a gallery where I could learn Spanish,” said Freddie, whose mother’s family is Mexican-American, though she wasn’t allowed to speak Spanish growing up.

Being in Mexico City helped Janka connect with his roots. “Latino culture is much broader than people assume,” he explains. “There’s not a lot of celebration of that. It touches on so many cultures. The term Hispanic is so limiting to understanding the Latino experience.”

While attending the international Art Basel fair in Miami, he met his future husband, a private art dealer. They moved to New York, where Freddie worked for four years as the associate director of the SculptureCenter in Long Island City.

His long-time friend and champion, the late Carolyn Glasoe Bailey, who hosted his wedding at her home in Ojai, was instrumental to bringing Freddie back home to work at MCA. “I get to work with people who are passionate about contemporary art,” he says of the job. “MCA has a lot of social justice components to it. It’s a reflection of our times.”

Why return to Santa Barbara? “When I was a student, I received support from the Scholarship Foundation, benefitted from internships at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and The Arts Fund, and was granted an award from the Profant Foundation,” he replies. “I’m investing in a community that invested in me.”

Freddie answers the Proust Questionnaire.

Which talent would you most like to have?

The ability to change the world for the better.

Which historical figure do you most identify with?

Some combination of Oscar Wilde, Alain Delon, and Cantinflas.

What is your current state of mind?

Emboldened by the resistance, yet fearful of what’s to come

What is your greatest fear?

Being alone and unnecessary.

What do you like most about your job?

I love working with people who are passionate about contemporary art and social justice and I love working with artists. It honestly couldn’t be better!

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

In general, everyone in the world holding hands and celebrating each other. Personally, a swimming pool with a view.

Who do you most admire?

My mother; she is fearless and blazes her own trail.

What is your greatest extravagance?

Doting on friends and family.

What is the quality you most like in people?

A care for people and a joie de vivre.

What is the quality you most dislike in people?

Bigotry.

What do you most value in friends?

Confidence and good taste.

What is your most marked characteristic?

Loud and charming.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Yaaaassss Kweeeeeen!

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Join Jenny Schatzle but I'm too lazy.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Building communities.

Where would you most like to live?

Santa Barbara.

What is your most treasured possession?

I don't have one.

Who makes you laugh the most?

My husband.

What is your motto?

Live life to it's fullest.

On what occasion do you lie?

In line at the grocery store.

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