



# Paul Kremer

Interview by Rosie Osborne

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**Tell us a little bit about where you grew up and the atmospheres that you were surrounded by.**

I was born in Chicago, but moved to Houston, Texas when I was 5. Both parents were teachers. I have an older sister and younger brother. I grew up across the street from NASA Johnson Space Center and my neighborhood was filled with astronauts, low ceilings, bad lighting, tan brick, wood panelling, wallpaper, and carpet. Very suburban, and comfortable, but I couldn't wait to get out.

**What were you like at school?**

Not a great student, but not horrible. Like most artists I avoided cliques and popular kids in my high school. I skipped going to baseball practice and it was a running joke that my coach would yell out "Where's Kremer!?" every day while I was lounging in my girlfriend's pool. The coach thought he would get his revenge by failing me. Luckily my dad was the drama and choir teacher of my school and when he found out that the coach didn't technically give



me a failing slip (because I skipped so much) he took it up with the principal and I passed with a C. Apparently my dad appreciated leisure time and didn't care for jock mentality.

**Did you try your hand at any other jobs, before becoming an artist?**

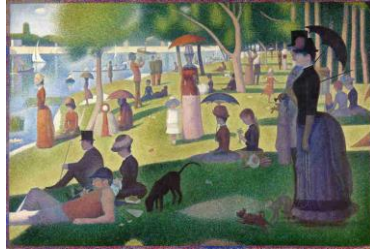
Yes, I didn't sell paintings until I was nearly 40 years old. Like most young kids I worked the night shift stocking shelves at a grocery store. I would work from 11pm-6am and then go to high school. I would fall asleep after school watching Bob Ross. Still do. I knew all along that I wanted to work with art, but didn't want a life working side jobs in order to make art, so I decided the next best thing would be to learn graphic design. I wanted to learn how to 'make art' while I was doing my job. I learned photoshop as it was becoming popular, and was early in creating graphics for websites like PBS and National Geographic. I owned my own design studio for twenty years and ended up working with some of my music heroes including Lou Reed and Tom Waits.

**Is there a piece of art that you vividly remember seeing for the first time, for the impact it had on you?**

I remember my mom taking me to the Art Institute of Chicago and backing me up to a painting, then turning me around to see a bunch of colorful dots. She told me to back away slowly and as I did "*A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*" by Georges Seurat appeared. I think that moment was big for me. More recently, I visited The Uffizi in Florence. Sandro Botticelli's *Spring* was so powerful in person that I had to sit down to understand what I was looking at. All the intricate details, the incredible array of color, the characters who seemed to come to life. I remember thinking (knowing) it was the most truly beautiful painting I had ever seen. That painting made me tear up, and I have no idea why... I didn't know a painting could do that. When I look at pictures of it now, I don't fully understand why I was so affected. Yeah it's beautiful, but I had a very special connection to that painting at that moment. Like seeing the most beautiful thing you can ever imagine, on acid.



*Spring*, Sandro Botticelli (Florence, 1445 -1510)



*A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, Georges Seurat, 1884-1886.

**In 2013, you created a Tumblr site called Great Art in Ugly Rooms. What was the inspiration behind this and what has it brought to your life?**

It started when I came across a picture of a [truck bed painting by Kaz Oshiro in a foyer](#). It wasn't that the house was ugly... just that this object looked out of place. And I realized that with my photoshop skills I could actually see how "great" paintings would look like in "ugly" rooms. I also see it as my own personal art history class. Searching for paintings that would fit in certain rooms revealed all sorts of artists and their stories. Researching so much about art was a great learning experience and very inspiring to me as a painter.

**Are there any rituals that you follow when you're painting, like listening to music?**

Yes, as boring as it sounds, I wake up at 4 am every morning to exercise. After I decide not to, I go back to sleep until I can't anymore. The moment after I wake up, but before I reach for my phone is usually when I am most creative. I go to the studio each day hoping to learn something new. And yes, painting with your favorite music cranked loud is something that everyone on earth (artist or not) should experience.

**Do you find it difficult to let go of certain paintings sometimes, or do you tend to part with them once they're sold?**

It is hard to say goodbye to a painting you are proud of making, however I am happy that people love them enough to live with, and that they might bring people some sort of relief. I love when people send pictures of my paintings installed in their homes... like seeing a long lost friend you haven't seen in a while.

**If you could go to any country (that you haven't been to) where would you go and why?**



I wish I could be a less anxious traveller. I am so jealous of people who love to travel, because they really do get to enjoy our world. Unfortunately I don't like being uncomfortable and not knowing what's next. Also I'd rather stay for long periods of time, instead of just passing through. I would like to see the landscapes of Iceland or New Zealand before I die. And I love to visit places that artists lived and painted, as it always gives a new perspective to old paintings.

**If you could collaborate with any artist in the world to make a painting, alive or dead, who would you choose and why?**

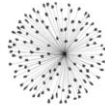
Ah, a very "be careful what you wish for" moment, as so many artists are complete assholes! I bet that my favorite artists would make the worst collaborators and probably selfish and boring to work with. Luckily I know what a great collaboration feels like -- I started the "*I Love You Baby*" collective with my best friends and we painted for 10 years together. We had the most fun making anti-art, which we all agreed was "so bad, that it wasn't good" and of course translates to GREAT now. ILYB was completely uncontrollable... and that complete lack of control is the most beautiful thing when you embrace it. It should be the ultimate goal for any artistic collaboration. <https://ilyb101.tumblr.com/> My partner in life Rebecca Stewart is currently a law professor, and happens to have the best artistic mind I know. I love making art with her.

**If you could visit any artist's studio from history, which one would you visit and why?**

I, like many, would love to know how Morris Louis did what he did. The fact that he was so secretive about it all, and that he painted all of the hundreds of giant paintings in his dining room is amazing to me. Kenneth Noland and he experimented together at some point (after their famous meeting with Helen Frankenthaler) and I would have loved to have been in that room when they were trying to figure it out. See: <https://youtu.be/XfQAI2-LX5I?t=684> and <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2017/april/10/a-movement-in-a-moment-colour-field-painting/>

**What's the most difficult thing about creating?**

Self loathing, self doubt, and self criticism are all thoughts that can paralyze your creativity. Fortunately I love that I never have doubted my beautiful thought provoking artwork ;)



**Is there one of your works that you're particularly proud of? If so, why?**

Yes, the first giant painting I made... a mostly black painting called Siren 01. I had an idea for the painting, but no idea how to actually make it. I poured about a gallon of paint onto a stretched canvas. I never worked so hard or fast trying to get paint smoothed out evenly. I panicked running around the painting. The canvas buckled the stretcher, and the stretcher bars poked into the canvas. I gave up and decided to destroy it the next day. When I returned to the studio I was shocked to see the painting had settled and dried perfectly. A wonderful feeling.



**If you could put a spotlight on an emerging artist that you think deserves it, who would you choose and why?**

Because I know so many artists that deserve attention, I will pick someone who I don't know, but admire. He's hardly emerging, but I think deserves recognition... Matteo Lucca is an artist based in Italy who makes figurative sculptures out of bread. In order to do this he has to build ovens. I am totally fascinated by his work and urge your readers to find him on youtube. See: <https://youtu.be/P1whlRcIgc> and <https://www.iloboyou.com/baked-bread-human-sculpture-matteo-lucca/>



**Have you experienced moments of failure that made you come back stronger as an artist?**

No, because failure, just like success, is relative. You can't fail as long as you are achieving your goals no matter how insignificant they are. I have made mistakes trusting people, but like anything, live and learn.

**If you could give one piece of advice to your younger self, what would you say to him?**

Do what you love.

**If you were stuck on a deserted island (and had all the food, water and shelter you needed) which 3 personal items would you bring?**

My iPhone, a fishing pole and my tackle box.

**When do you feel most free?**

When I'm in a great mood, with people I love, driving through a beautiful landscape, with the windows down and the music blaring.