

INTERVIEW WITH FAITH XLVII

How did you come up with your name ?

I came up with Faith47 in 1979, when I was a teenager. That was when I started painting graffiti lettering. It's also partly inspired by Weals 130, who introduced me to this art form.

How did you choose that name and the number ?

Within graffiti it's very much about creating your own identity, a lot of artists' names had numbers, this was rooted in early New York culture. When I chose my name, 47 was a lucky number for me. It had to do with my grandmother. The Roman numerals came later as they imply something mysterious and ancient.

You refer to your art as a practice. That's interesting. Why ?

I put so much time into my work, it's almost obsessive. The only way I can actually justify doing that is if I see it as a kind of spiritual practice. For me, making art is almost like a meditation. The purpose of what I'm learning when I'm creating work is a whole life experience. It's part of my journey. The roots run deep.



Did you always know that you wanted to be an artist ? Some of your pieces suggest classical training.

I have always been really interested in subcultures and music. From a very, very young age, I was strongly drawn to artistic

means of expression. Then when I was 17, I kind of hit the ground running and I didn't have the financial means to study at the time. So, I am self-taught ; it's been a lot of hard work and I've developed over the long term.

How would you describe your artistic path ?

I was part of a sub-cultural artistic movement in South Africa, which was unique because it was also one of the first movements that really incorporated youths from different communities. It was very diverse. We were the first generation who had made the transition to the new [South African] government system.

I was interested in interacting with the environments I was painting. I was more interested in how my work could be in conversation with the space. What is it saying? How does it affect the community that's living there? How do they view it? I started to create images that looked like they had been there forever, that became part of the narrative of the community. I did things to shape the area, but it was also the area that shaped me. That became highly educational for me.

When you began, was it an act of rebellion ? What was the spark ?

I think I definitely had something to prove. There was just frustration as well with the status quo. And excitement of being part of something underground. We didn't need everyone to understand what we were doing. There's a magic to that.

Was it hard to be a woman in that environment ?

It was challenging and, in the beginning, you have to be ready and prove yourself to win respect. But that also pushes you. Right from the beginning, I made sure I kept focusing on the quality and authenticity of my work so that nobody could say anything about being a woman but would instead speak about the work itself.

What piece do you think really earned it for you ? What was the subject ?

The early days were transformative. I spent seven months in the UK and was highly influenced by the artists I met there and returned to South Africa with a new perspective. One of my favorite works today, which I felt spoke to the community, was a project in Durban where the city commissioned me to paint several pillars of the Warrick Junction Freeway underpass. It's an area that was quite contentious, definitely dangerous. But it's an incredible space. I think we made it a lot more accessible, and it will last longer because it pays homage to the traders who work there, making them honorary guardians of that space.

How do you define your space in the art world?

I think of myself as a multidisciplinary artist. I have been quite explorative in the past several years : I've been working on video and immersive projects for example, holograms of the moon in the forests of Sweden. Larger video installations for the gallery environment and light installations as well as traditional bronze sculpture.

There is a grace in your work that one can only describe as feminine. Your style is very different from the artists who have come before you in these projects.

We have grown up in a male-oriented worldview, historically which has affected all professions. On a personal level, women have been told that we're too emotional, for example. I'm a part of a new wave of thinking which dates back to the pre-monotheistic influences. We are actively reclaiming the feminine as something that is powerful and embraces the skills of intuition, the honesty of vulnerability and being attuned to those qualities we have been told are weak but in fact hold much wisdom and open doors for human compassion.

Could you please describe the importance of harmony in your work ?

The world has so many problems ecologically and politically and I think part of it is due to the fact that there's an imbalance between masculine and feminine. That needs to be addressed : it's an energetic phenomenon. We're cultivating a shift in perspective. It's about protecting Nature, the earth, animals and the environment.

It seems that social causes are very important to you.

I got to a point where I realized that the shift that needs to happen in society is actually personal : they come down to how we relate to each other, how we relate to the planet, how we see animals in relation to oneself. That's why I wanted to start making art that could help to create a shift in a more internal sense, to trigger emotions and shift internal perspective. Which effectively would then bring about larger social changes. A lot of my paintings related to animals, wild creatures entering our over-saturated urban landscapes. Cities can be cold and impersonal, so bringing mystical creatures into urban spaces invites people to use their imagination. They might also sense something deeper or reconnect to something archetypal and mystical. It's important to keep that fire alive.

Do you have a spirit animal, a favorite recurring theme ?

I had a dream about a panther recently, so I have been thinking about that. I grew up with my mother taking us camping and hiking, so we were very connected to nature. I saw a lot of wild animals at a young age and



was just in awe of how incredibly beautiful they are. When I first started to think about what I wanted to do, I was interested in working in nature conservation to protect our relationship with animals. I guess in some ways I have kept true to this feeling.

Your work is universal. Where do you feel “at home” ?

I definitely have always felt so rooted and connected to South Africa, but I don't believe in patriotism. I feel that we are connected to the Earth as a planet, conceptually. I've been traveling non-stop since 2006 so I am,

like all of us, a citizen of the Earth. I feel connected to so many cultures and people. I see myself as someone with an international perspective. I think it's quite a unique position to have and I'm grateful for that. But sometimes this nomadic lifestyle does leave one unsettled, too.

In your connection with earth and nature there is an obvious link with Hennessy's craft. Have you been to Cognac ?

One thing really struck me in Cognac, which was that Hennessy's process takes time. A lot of time. I thought that was really beautiful because so many things in this day and age are heavily affected by technology and everything moves so fast. Hennessy is rooted in very simple principles, which seem the same as they were when they started more than 250 years ago. To me, there is great beauty in being connected with a completely natural process.

What things inspired you most about this project ?

This project dovetailed perfectly with the things I am always thinking about anyway, which are the cycles of nature, the phases of the moon, the seasons and a circle representing Time's cyclical nature and how all of these things make us alive. The artwork just kind of flowed. It was a good match!





What do you think attracted Hennessy to you as an artist ?

Hennessy is a very old House that started as a family business and has stood the test of Time thanks to its very high quality. As an artist, that makes the House interesting

and relatable – it has a human touch. I like to think of my work as something that's sought out, that takes Time and is considerate of raw materials and mediums. There is an alchemy to the way we both work : we both take basic substances and turn them into something remarkable. I've often used gold in my work for that very reason. Distilling and assembling eaux-de-vie is like my process : it's about taking basic elements and transforming them into something extraordinary. I was also really impressed that the barrels are still made meticulously by hand, by people who have been handing down their tools to the next generation. That was very moving. There's a real sense of skill and craftsmanship, in addition to the science involved. It's very interesting.

Do you feel optimistic about the future ?

Noam Chomsky said that "hope is a strategy for making a better future," because that's the only way we can help ourselves or anyone. We live in tense, sad, difficult times but we must be hopeful and aspire to be better as we have to hand down a better planet to the next generations.

How does a brand like Hennessy benefit art ?

I think it is wonderful to see Hennessy's ongoing program with artists. Its roster is very strong ; the House is putting time and effort into that and they are quite discerning about who they work with. That creates a good space to work on. I think it's important and I think Hennessy is doing a good job of it.

Hennessy
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LIMITED EDITION BY
Faith XLVII



How do you see yourself fitting into the Hennessy family of artists with this tenth-year celebration ?

It's a great honor, first of all because the lineup over those 10 years features people I look up to and have been inspired by. They're all amazing, incredible artists. For me, it's an honor to sit within that lineage, to be the first female to step into that space. That's actually really important.

How do you enjoy Hennessy?

I like it best on the rocks but I also enjoy the cocktail recipe we created together.

What special design elements would you like to talk about ?

I tried to keep my design natural and bring in elements of gold and sunset hues to give the whole bottle a warm feeling. The lettering is inspired by the chalk writing on the barrels in the Founder's Cellar ; those are the traces left by the barrel makers.

Your design looks like a mandala.

That goes back to the aspect of Time. There's a code to it with references to seasons and directions and showing how everything is cyclical — everything constantly moves in a cyclical way. That goes for Hennessy as well. The cycles of the Sun and Moon are absolutely vital. We are dependent on nature, even though we think we can supersede it. That's important. There was also a reference to rain and clouds and vines.

Would you say this project is the beginning of a new cycle for you ?

Yes. I have a show in South Africa in April that's rooted in some of the country's social issues and my experiences growing up there. Looking ahead, I am ready to move into a new body of work that's considering and researching the Sun's symbolism as well as natural metaphors for our current evolution.

Can you please describe certain details, such as the lettering ?

I often incorporate text into my work. Sometimes it will be references to textures and markings in the street — so even if it's graffiti or text I find in abandoned buildings, I layer that into my work. I brought that to my project for Hennessy through a reference to its barrels. I also incorporate Latin in my work because it's mysterious and ancient. Not everybody understands it. If you really want to know what it means, you have to look it up. When you work in layers, not everything is legible straightaway. Sometimes you have to make a little extra effort to grasp what a work is all about.

What is your approach to layering ?

With my roots, where I come from, I seldom start with just a white wall. I really like working in places that already have a certain character. It started because I was painting lots of public spaces. I love working with that and using the textures of an old wall, for instance, or bringing beauty out of places that people have neglected. Natural substances like wood have a grain to them.

You're used to working on a monumental scale. Was that challenging ?

I've always had a very large range of scale. It's just a different process, and it's a lot more intimate when you're working small. I really love working small because it feels a lot more personal.

Can we please talk about your use of pigments and the use of wood ?

For the bottle, we tried to capture the direction of seasons and also how Time folds on itself, the cyclical nature of things.

I started with wood. First, I sketched on paper to figure out what I wanted to do. And then we decided on the Sun as the main element, and Time. Then came quadrants, with the moon and the water. The gold leafing and the vines came at the end. We have photographs of different points of progression, in order to achieve a kind of layering. Painting was quite technical for that reason : we were running the raw artwork down to the photographer every second day. That was quite a process. We worked in stages. First the moons, then clouds before anything was put on top of them. We wanted to get the Sun on its own. And then of course there was the gold leaf. It was quite a time-consuming process. There's intuition but there's also the inspiration of ancient manuscripts and old renditions of Suns, the wind and calendars. They're definitely an inspiration.

How do you see urban art evolving ?

It's a very interesting movement because on the one hand it's global, but on the other it's not art that fits just one definition. If you look at all the artists involved, they're extremely diverse in terms of their style, what they're trying to say and how they relate to their environment. It's really interesting specifically because it's totally fragmented. And I think that's why the contemporary art world has struggled with it a lot too, because it defies definition. It has some shared characteristics, but it's not a cohesive movement. It doesn't have a manifesto or anything like that.

What's been interesting for me is to follow some of the individual artists coming out

of this movement, who are developing practices in sculpture and new media, so many different directions.

How do you see Hennessy helping the community ?

What Hennessy is doing actually aligns with what I'm seeing : they don't look at this art movement as a genre. They're looking at who's doing interesting work, who is in some way associated with a larger movement and they're spotlighting a few individuals who are excelling, giving them more room to work and move forward.

What keeps you grounded ?

My son keeps me grounded in my personal and creative life. I always have things I want to talk about, but sometimes I find that words alone are not adequate. Being an artist helps me to express things I really can't communicate in words.

What is your ultimate goal ?

There's no ultimate goal. I believe in humility and a lifelong, humble process. Creating is like having a friend, somebody that you walk with through life. And it's part of my life that I'm able to articulate and speak with. It's a great privilege, a great honor that I'm grateful for. Art has been such a blessing. To me the creative process is bigger than life. That goes for music, too. Where would society be if we didn't have these outlets ? Human beings have such profound consciousness, we need to have art and music and endeavors to really reflect that.



NOT FOR FRANCE

