

MEAGAN CRABLE ROCKHARD INTERVIEW

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Questions by: Erik Nádudvari

Answers by: Meagan Crable (Artist)

Translation by: Erik Nádudvari

**1. At the beginning of our conversation, can you please introduce yourself to our readers?
...add elevator speak...**

Hi Erik, my name is Meagan Kathleen Crable, which is what the initials stand for in "Gallery MKC", the title I've given to my website and the initials I sign on my artwork. I am 30 years old, born and raised in Maryland, a beautiful state with the Chesapeake Bay in my backyard, and about a half hour drive to Washington, D.C.

I am an artist, a lover of music, metal in particular, and a free-spirited nature enthusiast. Through my art I help people express a fantasy by creating custom commissioned illustrations emphasizing their individuality and interests. I also create custom art for bands, mainly metal album covers, my passion. I focus on the concept of the album and create illustrations that express the band's artistic intent, musical style that hopefully sends a personal message that helps market the record.

Thinking creatively, keeping myself very busy with projects and learning new things is what I live for.

2. Where you studied art? Are you the person who needs its own studio for creative work or your works come to alive in your house?

Formally I studied art at the Maryland College of Art and Design. Informally I have been learning about art since I first picked up a crayon. People around me noticed my talent when I was a small child and this encouraged me to pursue my life long journey as an artist.

My current studio is a room in my house solely dedicated to making art. It's furnished with a huge desk, extra table for on-going projects, lamps, a bunch of art supplies, pieces of inspiration pinned on the walls, a stereo (have to have music while working) and an occasional sleeping cat.

I start my day in the studio jumping right in to whatever art I am working on fully charged. Not having a lot of unwanted interruptions keeps me focused and committed to meeting my deadlines. About ten years ago I shared a house with a few artist friends and the space would become so crowded and crazy I would escape to the bathroom and set up my easel in the shower. I kept all my paint in there and had a stereo wedged in the window. It became my sanctuary away from all the distractions.

3. Working on a new picture, I'd like to ask you where you take your inspiration from? Or, does inspiration come after you?

When I start a commissioned piece, let's say for an album, I want the picture to mean something and connect to the music. Growing up, I would visit record shops, browse through records and CD's and see albums that had really killer art on the cover. I figured the album had to be just as awesome and too often, that wasn't the case and I was left disappointed.

When I create an album cover, I listen to the music and work with the imagery that comes to me. Just a few words can lead my mind into a swarm of images that I begin putting on paper, which evolves into an entire scene like a page in a storybook. I like my illustrations to tell a story even if it's as simple as utter chaos.

4. Do you look at this world, nature or society around you as something visual, objects which you can illustrate? What techniques do you use in such a creative and detailed work?

I love the diversity that life gives us, the good and beautiful as well as the evil and ugly. It provides contrast and without it life would be so damn boring. The primary muse for my work is the uncertainty of nature. I am inspired by it's raw energy and beauty. My work develops out of the colors, patterns and unexpected details in the world around us. I approach my art without any preconceived notions of what the final piece will look like. Instead, my illustrations are revealed through a discovery process, interpreting and responding to what's happening around me. As a result, each illustration possesses a very unique identity.

5. I presume you like going to galleries. How about the famous galleries in Paris, Rome, Madrid or London? Being in Washington DC, what gallery would you recommend me to see?

I look forward to visiting many art galleries in Europe! Museum H.R. Giger in Switzerland would truly be a rare experience as well as Galleria Degli Ofizi in Florence, Italy where many works of Sandro Botticelli are hung. Luckily, I have been able to see great works on loan from Europe here in Washington, D.C. I would definitely recommend you visit the National Gallery of Art. It has an enormous collection of American and European works including a beautiful sculpture garden. Also check out the National Portrait Gallery and The Phillips Collection, an intimate setting for seeing art up close and personal.

6. Imagine you could travel back in ancient or medieval times in Europe. What architects, artists, sculptors or even poets you would like to see or talk to?

I've always been a huge fan of the early Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli (Birth of Venus, Pallas and the Centaur). His work was so beautiful, graceful and powerful. As a kid I would look through my mother's art history books and was sparked by his art. I think this is where I became a bit of a daydreamer merging my love for reality and fantasy. I also love the Baroque, Post Impressionists, Early Renaissance and Romantic period artists and am a fan of Renoir, Matisse and Van Gogh.

As I got older, late teens, a lot of my inspiration for drawing came from the strength and power of the human body. Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci's figure studies were great examples of the bodies contour when I started drawing people. Some years later, I found myself taken in by the original classic pin up girls that Vargas and Bill Ward created showing the sultry power and beauty of the female form. Frank Frazetta, well known by all, is one of my all time favorite artists. His work is absolutely amazing and has been referenced and simulated hundreds of thousands of times by others especially in the world of metal. I love the way he created immense strength, power and allure in his characters. The men he painted were intense and bestial and the women seemed almost feral... mysterious, seductive and totally powerful. His characters seemed as if they were gods and goddesses of some enchanting and brutal realm. I would look at his paintings forever, mesmerized by the scene, the many colors he used to create shadow and the movement he created in each picture. He was brilliant. All of these artists fed my inspiration leading me to create the Femme Fatale series of pin ups and the elements of fantasy in most of my illustrations.

7. Alan Rickman (British actor and graphic artist) said that graphics cannot exist without discipline and that discipline builds on the detail. What kind of personal effort and other qualities are needed to being such a great artist as Meagan Crable?

The ability for me create art comes directly from my inner strength. My journey through life hasn't always been a sun-lit path. All the crazy and horrible or very sad experiences that have entered my world have shaped me into who I am today. Those challenging times forced me to dig down deep in myself and find my inner strength, to face my fears and pull me through. I won't quit and walk away from something even if it appears to be a hopeless mess. It's just an opportunity... disguised and a place where my own growth takes off (being open-minded really helps). Commitment, determination, and resilience built my discipline and I approach my art the same way.

8. Looking at the portraits, a woman (Femme Fatales Pin Up) is a centre of your world (the Universe) expressed in vivid colors. By no means, they are beautiful. Do you use models or are they result of your creative mind?

I would say a little of both... asking friends to pose in order to get the right angle and perspective or even myself posing in a mirror to make sure what I'm drawing could actually be possible. This aids in the accuracy for form but not used for their physical appearances, those come from my imagination. I took figure drawing in college, which is where I really developed an understanding of the human body. Not only did I fine-tune my technique of drawing people but I also learned about anatomy, what's under the skin and bones which gives our flesh shape, definition and tone.

I usually begin with a quick gestured idea of the subject. It isn't until I begin adding layers of color that the person really comes to life. I want to capture their "soul" and in order to do that, I've got to catch their physical form but also something behind their eyes. It comes with focus, patience, diligence and a lot of short, nubby pencils.

9. How much is realistic to see you as teacher of art in the future?

I've thought about teaching and think I'd be a pretty good teacher. I enjoy what I do and have a natural propensity to want to help others. If I can do so with art it's even better. Maybe I can fit that in somewhere down the line... Right now, I have other ideas and goals in place. Mainly, I want to do a lot more art for bands and their album covers. I also want to get involved in the musical production aspect of recording. This is down the road, but Vince Matthews (Criminal Element and Dying Fetus) and I have talked about the idea of starting a small record label. Being able to connect these ideas to plans then to reality would be beautiful!

10. Death metal is quite often a matter of dark and negative expressions. What unknown power attracts you to this specific genre? How about different genres? Do you listen to rock, pop or classic?

Death metal, Swedish death metal, thrash, grind, power, classic, heavy, gore, gothic...Metal in general is my favorite genre of music. I grew up listening to a lot of different types of music. 70's classic-rock, 80's gothic-rock and 90's grunge but nothing has ever dug its claws into me so deep as death metal. It strikes a deep chord within me... that I don't believe will ever change. Bands like Black Sabbath, Edge of Sanity, Pan.Thy.Monium, Tiamat, Cemetery, Amorphis, Early Entombed are as close to my soul as it gets...early Sepultura, Gorefest, Vader, Jungle Rot...this list can go on for a while.

Right now I'm in the process of collecting every album on vinyl. Our collection is pretty immense and our apartment makes for a very interesting mini-museum. One day I would love to check out the music shops in Europe...I would definitely have a field day.

11. I really feel you breathed life into the story of the Criminal Element album "Criminal Crime Time". Was it your intention or you just had a certain imagination how to illustrate the new album?

The album Criminal Crime Time was written by Vince Matthews and Maliq Emanuel in our living room. It was non-stop Criminal Element for months, which was demanding and great. During this time, I began working on the cover art, everyday from wake to sleep, if there was any. I got so caught up into creating the illustrations that it was hard to stop and take a break. Listening to these songs while creating the scene was a great experience.

Vince and I sat down a few days before recording and put our heads together on what this was going to be. He wanted a scene with guys playing poker and one guy getting caught cheating at his hand...so that was my jumping off point. After that, ideas flooded me, and it all came together. My vision for the album art developed more and more as I went along. I love working with Vince because we see eye to eye on almost everything; we make a great team. He is amazingly talented, musical... and full of creative ideas. When our ideas come together, it creates an explosion that leads to really great things. Looking forward to what the future holds.

12. Do you illustrate other metal albums? Books or magazines, perhaps?

Yes, I love variety in my projects. Creating art for metal bands is perfect for me. That is where I feel I can really set my mind free and go beyond the orthodox. For metal and anything raw, untamed and brutal, I can move beyond the typical boundaries of "commercial art" for the masses. The first cover I did was for an album titled "The Ascension", which depicted the end of the world, Judgment Day. On the front cover, people are running for their lives as demons flock the Christian cross, buildings and cars are on fire, people are falling and getting trampled in the fury. The back of the album is the same image re-drawn but the people have been transformed in an instant to skeletons. The demons have set the cross on fire and fly off into the billowing, smoke-filled sky.

Right now, I am in the process of designing two album covers for the band Sadistic Vision from Pennsylvania, a state north of Maryland. These covers will be total gore, rotting bodies, charred remains, torture, mutilation and tormented souls. I'm really excited to reveal these very soon.

Designing and illustrating albums covers is what I have always longed to do and one of the main goals for this chapter of my life. I hope the floodgates open and I have the opportunity to do many more including illustrations for other mediums as well...books, magazines. I've created art for a computer game cover and storyboards for photo shoots. A little different from my "normal" but enjoyed the projects all the same.

As I mentioned earlier I started drawing custom pin up girls several years ago that range from the elegant "classic" style to the more dark and sultry femme fatale / horror-themed vixens. They are commission-based so each one is created specific to the client. I incorporate aspects of their personality and style in each to make it truly unique to that person.

13. If I am not wrong, you have made a comic book for the Criminal Element album. Can you please reveal us more details of this book?

Ooh...This is a project in the works. Vince will be writing a true story about the past 20 years in the metal scene. It will go all the way back to the early 90's, the hey-days of the death metal band Deceased and will detail the entire ideology behind Criminal Element.

I will be illustrating this story using a comic book format featuring members of Deceased, Dying Fetus, Misery Index and Suffocation. Every character will be drawn completely true to that person. This is going to be a HUGE project and will definitely be an amazing feat. I think this will be really interesting and unique for everyone... kind-of like a home-movie / documentary but drawn out and made into a book!

14. I have noticed you are very interested in quality of sound when it comes to a new album. Meagan Crable as artist, illustrator and sound engineering. (You are full of surprises.) How does it work together?

Music is very dear to me and has had such a profound impact on my life. It's always been a source of retreat from unpleasant situations and periods in my life. To paint a visual, these great albums I'm referring to, are like ever-burning flames even in the darkest of times.

Art and music fit together for me.

The perfect time for me to really absorb an album is when I am working on a project. I turn off the outside world and take in every element of the songs. In doing this I have developed an ear to hear the subtle and compelling elements that make a song profound. I listen to albums that are great but didn't get the credit they deserved simply because their production wasn't very good. It failed to capture the power or intended emotion put out by the band. I think I could contribute to an album by offering my "ear" as a listener. This is why I have a keen interest in being involved in the engineering of the recording.

15. A new follower of "Criminal Crime Time" is coming. I know, it looks like I am pulling out some information from you. However, are you already working on a new cover artwork? Can you unveil us some details?

Yes, there's definitely something in the works. The next project will be the new Criminal Element/ Human Decline split compilation off of Metal Age Productions. The Criminal Element side of the album will be "Maiden Brooklyn", another creation written in our living room, so I am very familiar and fond of each song. I've been a big Human Decline fan for a while and am quite inspired by Vincent Castiglia (guitarist / writer) who also is an amazing artist that paints using his own blood! Definitely check out his work.

Vinny (Castiglia) and I will be joining artistic forces on this album. I'll be doing the art for Criminal Element and the cover while he does his magic for the Human Decline portion. The booklet will be a collaboration of both of our work. I know this is will be an ultimate pairing of musical and artistic talents. When I learned this album was a "GO", I immediately knew what I wanted to do for the cover. I don't want to give too much away but it is going to be dark with a main gangster character. It will be highly detailed and full of anticipation for what this gangster will do... Anyway, I think this will become another favorite addition to my collection.

Thank you Erik for giving me the honor of doing this interview for Rock Hard Magazine. I am a huge fan of your magazine and look forward to showing you these projects when they're completed. I also want to thank Metal Age Productions for being such an awesome label. The bands, record labels and magazines I drew for the graffiti walls on the "Criminal Crime Time" cover was our way of paying homage and respect to all who make metal a thriving culture from past to present. Being a part of something so special is what drives me to do more and develop my skill as an artist and as a visual extension to the world of metal. To illustrate something that people all over the world are going to hold in their hands and absorb as they turn up the volume on their stereo is truly a dream come true for me. It's like standing on the "topmost step of the earth". Please check out my work at www.gallerymkc.com and Gallery MKC on Facebook.