

"I'd like to be something that isn't likely to be killed or eaten quickly by a human—some type of bird," answers British artist Matt Wilde when asked what animal would he like to be for a day. "And get a feeling of what it would be like to fly," he finishes.

T rue to form, the initial answer captures Wilde's candor view on life. His work interprets it. This blunt and rational answer can be easily traced to his upbringing. Having lived most of his life in Warrington, a town in between Liverpool and Manchester, closer to the latter, Wilde knows all too well the lifestyle and beliefs of residents dependant on the industrial giants based in the region.

Blue-collared families do not bend lightly to creative endeavors. After working eight years as a plumbing and heating engineer, Wilde took the plunge and enrolled into a university to study art. Despite warnings and skepticism, Wilde supported himself with various jobs from working part-time at IKEA to summers jobs as a strawberry picker to earn his Fine Arts degree in 1998 from Liverpool John Moores University.

Roughly sketched individuals drawn by charcoal in front of a colored background emphasizing the natural transparency cities possess, is Wilde's forte. Mimicking his own struggle against the momentum of his environment, he relays his emotions and sights in charcoal, acrylic, crayons as well as other found objects.

To capture the energy and movement of the residents, he explains his choice in charcoal, "I think that the immediate lines and scribbles in a sketch are often all that you need and are more powerful than brush strokes."

In his most recent exhibition held in London of October this year, Wilde included portraits of himself swept away with the wind whilst holding on to his painting—as it truly happened once on his way to a show at John Moores. Conveniently, it simultaneously portrays the ups and downs of life as an artist.

Despite strong opposing winds—both figuratively and literally—Wilde carried through and credits this time as truly defining his path.

"That experience makes me more determined and more stubborn really. From then on, I've been very strong-minded. If I hadn't gone to work before for 8 years, I wouldn't have that same drive."

In addition to going against the advice of family and friends and self-funding his way through school, Wilde fathered his first of three sons while attending classes. As a father and full-time artist, he has taken on his challenges matter-of-factly comparable to a mechanic jostling with a difficult suspension. But it is through these experiences that he inventively captures the world around him.

The bulk of his work focuses on the what he terms the "rat-race" of life, displaying the masses need to earn money quickly to spend it equally so. His first solo exhibition titled "shop till you drop"

focuses on this particular issue, drawing from random receipts and newspaper clippings, Wilde visually comments of how everything we do is recorded and documented at a given point and in relation to what is bought and sold with criticism and dry humor all at once.

It's his grounded personality spoken through his raw vision to the sights and sounds around him that catches the eye of Nick Betney, director of art gallery Artzu in Manchester. As a leading international gallery known for its art programs commissioned by high-profiled companies, Artzu recognized talent straight away.

Through Artzu, Wilde was signed for a special project commissioned by automobile company IM Group to contribute works for its new facility. As a rite of passage for many artists, Wilde found himself having to create pieces with a set vision. But the auteur found solace in the margins and constructed his independent voice by speaking through the restrictions in his own visual adaptation.

His talent continues to develop experimenting in new forms of style and technique. His recent fall show introduced a break from the canvas with three-dimensional pieces, including two circular wall pieces extending outwards, one containing a mold of a city landscape with the charcoaled public positioned in the front and another semi-circle featuring subway riders in the metro.

Hoping to one day showcase at Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, Wilde persists despite the global economic crisis with steadfast determination and innovation. His works have caught flight as he embarks on his first international exhibition to be held in Ho Chi Minh next year.

"It's all very new to me, it's all quite new and good at the same time. I don't really say no to many things," comments Wilde.

Trained in dodging incredulous influences and external crises, Wilde clearly has two feet on the ground but soars above to survive. ■

