

Essay by Chris Mars, April 29, 2019

The addition of more color into my work – or, more diverse color in a single painting – represents a bit of a paradox in my approach. Over the years (it's now around 18 years that my primary means of expression has been painting) I've worked to hone my technique so that the act of painting itself becomes second nature – when the act of painting is itself second nature, I am freed to focus not on execution, but on what I mean to say, conceptually, within a given work. In my earliest work, I see a trace of fear – fear in the form of restraint. The medium and how to handle it was so present in my mind as I worked. In a sense, I had to battle the paint itself in order to create the painting I meant to. Eventually, through practice, the act of painting became natural, and it is then that the act of painting became, as an endeavor, more meditative and peaceful. With the fear of the medium absent, the flow of conversation that exists between me, the world I'm seeking to reflect upon, and the surface became less and less obstructed; more and more open, if you will.

To be able to spend years having the act of painting be a source of peace has been amazing. But comfort can lead to complacency. The free-flow I'd worked so hard to create needed a new challenge, technically speaking. Like many painters, there are colors and combinations of colors I've favored, and ones I avoided for one reason or another – preference, taste, need...or fear. Taking on fear by incorporating those colors and palettes that had previously intimidated me – or by increasing the volume and diversity of color in my work – has served to invigorate me on a technical level. But there's more to it too. My current palettes and color choices – as did my previous palettes and color choices – reflect where I am, personally, relative to the world. There have been times when my world view was in concert with a more limited or restricted palette. But now, my relationship to the world – internally and externally both – is itself somehow...broader, maybe more optimistic even. I think the color in my most recent work reflects this. Also, historically, I'd use certain elements of realism – most commonly, a typically “beautiful” face, as a more readily accessible “lure” to draw people into the more confrontational or challenging elements of my

work. While this remains a tool I'm attracted to, I also find that typically "beautiful" color has the same effect of luring a viewer into the work, even in the absence of more easily accessed realism.

My approach remains spontaneous and organic – I don't sketch, I don't plan out a composition...I typically don't even go into a new painting with much of a plan for it at all. I still approach in a very "present" sort of way; my "plan" is rarely more specific than single or multiple figures, and even then, it tends to veer. The same is true of my color choices – they are spontaneous and organic, borne of what best suits the conversation that exists between myself, the surface and the world as large as I work. So ultimately, the more intense or varied color is a reflection of that, versus a premeditated choice. But it's there, and reflecting on why it's there hopefully interests the viewer as much as it does me. The act of painting remains so exciting to me in part because it is not a destination; it's a journey. The destination is, honestly, a surprise to me, and something I can reflect on with as much intrigue as anyone else. It's self-expression, and also self exploration. I can look to a painting I've finished to tell me something about my own state of mind I may not even have been conscious of myself in real time. The combination of technique, concept, execution and result remains mysterious, and as such is so compelling and satisfying, always. I feel so incredibly lucky to spend my days and nights at the easel. It's simultaneously comforting and challenging, and while I also enjoy other means of self-expression – I make films, I make music from time to time, I draw once in awhile – it's painting that best represents my creative vision.