

A Feast for the Eyes

Circuitous Succession: An Exhibition Series
Curated by Jason Miller – Artwork by Mike Coulson

I first read **L'Art** by Ezra Pound in college and it is one of those things that revisits my thoughts from time to time. Pound was part of the Modernist movement and I believe this poem is in the Imagist style. It's full of descriptive words that brings a very vivid image to mind. As you read the poem, visualize in your mind what is being described.

L'Art by Ezra Pound

***Green arsenic smeared
on an egg-white cloth,
Crushed strawberries!
Come, let us feast our
eyes.***

This poem is not about a traditional still life depicting a bowl of strawberries but it is essentially a word-painting of color combinations. The image I visualize is very abstract, painterly with a beautiful green being smeared onto the egg white cloth. Then strawberries crushed onto the cloth with the red bleeding into the green and egg white. The subject matter is contradictory, the arsenic is rat poison and deadly while the strawberries are sweet and tasty to consume. The colors are intensified by being complements – they are not just morsels of color but a feast

for our eyes to consume. “Come, let us feast our eyes.”

***Beauty lies in the eyes
of the beholder***

- 3rd century BC Greece possibly Plato

We've all heard this saying many times, so much so that it has possibly become cliché. But there is a profound truth in it. We all define beauty differently. We are all individuals with different tastes, backgrounds and life experiences. Our friends, peers, culture and society all influence how we think and how we define beauty. Everyone has a different opinion of what constitutes beauty. The image conjured up from the Pound poem is beautiful to me and since we consume it visually, no worries about the poison.

One way to explain some of the thought processes behind my art would be to show photos I have taken and what drew me to them. I always take a camera with me when traveling. I take the same pictures everyone does but also find some hidden gems, things a lot of folks would overlook or find undesirable. The goal is to open peoples' eyes to a different way of seeing and to find beauty in places

they have previously overlooked. I've never shown any of these photographs, they were taken primarily for reference, possibly to be used as a starting place for a painting.

The Photos

The first photo is the bright yellow picture, very abstract in nature. Yellow is a color that signifies caution, school buses and warning signs are painted this color and in this case a platform cover alongside a train track. The color signifies danger, anyone crossing over it would stop and look both ways before crossing the tracks.

The second photo with a similar yellow also has a functional purpose. This was not drawn on the curb for an aesthetic or artistic reason but to mark something underneath the concrete – possibly replacing a water main. It caught my eye because of the texture and worn paint, the tell tale signs of time and use.

The third and fourth photos are a soothing turquoise with rust. They were taken on a back street in Texas. I first passed by the dumpster but it stayed on my mind so later I stopped to take a few photos. These are details



Yellow Platform Cover >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print

[Click on the image to view on website](#)



Sidewalk Marking >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print



Turquoise Dumpster Detail 1 >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print



Turquoise Dumpster Detail 2 >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print

of a dumpster that's smelly and ugly, considered an eyesore by most anyone. The turquoise has faded by the elements accentuating the many scratches and dents covered in rust. Time and weather have created a surface patina offering rich imagery on which to feast our eyes.

The next is a close-up of the floor in the hallway (above center) at my daughter's school. It's where students have dripped, splattered and tracked paint as they worked.



Closeup of Studio Floor >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print

All the marks are random, nothing was planned. The blue is very rich next to the yellow tape to partition the space. It was just waiting to be discovered.

A concrete wall (above) of an underpass revealed this image of random air bubbles in concrete and something brushed on the surface that created a bold statement.

The next four images (below) were taken in a train yard and are images of weathered paint and rust on box



Concrete Wall of Underpass >>
24"x24", Ultrachrome Print

cars and cabooses. The colors and relationships of the markings are amazing. They exhibit many of the rules we have been taught about creating art, varying sizes and shapes, complementary colors, contrast, balance, spontaneity, etc.

I believe one of the roles of the artist is to offer up new imagery, found or created, to help others see the world in which we live through different eyes – to make others aware of beauty which can be found in the commonplace.



Train Detail 1, 24"x30", Ultrachrome Print >>



Train Detail 2, 24"x30", Ultrachrome Print >>

Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.

Confucius



Train Detail 3, 24"x30", Ultrachrome Print >>



Train Detail 4, 24"x30", Ultrachrome Print >>

The Paintings

The paintings pictured below are in a series I'm calling "Artifacts." The reason for this is that some of the textures remind me of fossils one sees in the earth. Clusters of shapes embodied in the paint reveal something implied underneath. The surfaces are made up of many layers of paint, sometimes scraping off the top layer to reveal something beneath. All this culminating in a rich surface of texture and color on which we can feast our eyes.

For me painting is a discovery process that allows capturing the unexpected by capitalizing on

random developments that occur while painting due to the inherent properties of paint. The idea is to take advantage of the unexpected, learn from these new insights and use them to add uniqueness and variation to the artwork.

As I make marks, areas are discovered that I want to keep, others I may paint out or try a different approach. Much of the process is trial and error until something resonates with me and the painting. The paintings emerge from a process of working, work hard when things are going well and work harder when things aren't. Work until unity and balance are

achieved by observing, reacting to and preserving that which is good.

The layering and textures relate to a passage of time that I talked about in the photos, where paint on the sidewalk is worn down from traffic and where the paint on the metal dumpster has peeled, revealing layers of color beneath and ultimately allowing the rust to form.

When you leave here tonight and you're walking back to the car and you discover a neat pattern in a crack on the sidewalk or you see something commonplace in a new light, then I've done my job.



Artifact: Cat's Eye, 24"x24" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013



Artifact: Emerald City, 30"x30" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013



Artifact: Passage of Time, 36x36" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013



Artifact: Remnants Revealed, 48"x48" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013



Artifact: Residue, 30"x30" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013



Artifact: Road to the Golden City, 36x36" >>
Acrylic on Canvas, 2013

The Wall of Things

Jason also asked me to bring in some things found in my studio or things of interest to me and describe how they might relate to my paintings. So, some of the things you will find in my studio or hanging along the staircase leading to my studio are family photos, old antique clocks, plants and other nick knacks I've collected along the way. I'm very family oriented, my wife and I have four children and nine grandkids. They all have blessed and enriched our lives.



Riding in the Magic Chair, 36"x45", Oil on Canvas, 1980 >>

I have always grown cacti and succulents since my college days. I'm just fascinated with the uniqueness of these plants and enjoy nurturing them and watching them grow. These plants have a different type of beauty from local native plants. They have thick fleshy limbs, leaves and bodies, many covered in thorns. Some may not like them because they are prickly with a potential for danger, like the green arsenic. But these green globs of plant flesh really appeal to me and, when handled with respect, prove to be very rewarding to grow.



I've been tinkering with clocks since I was a kid – my father collected and I helped refurbish them. I've never done a painting of a clock but some of the characteristics do carry over. The old clocks are kind of like the old dumpster, age has played a role in making them



interesting. Time enhances the patina on the wood and it is often darkened showing signs of age and wear.

The dials are no longer white and crisp but yellowed and worn from the many times the clock's time was reset and the finger brushed the numbers.



Like the dumpster, age and this passage of time, bring a lot of character to an object. In my art, all my life experiences and the influences that have made me who I am, have a direct influence and become a part of the work.

Every place I've been and every color I've seen flows onto the canvas in new and different combinations. People ask me why I want to do abstract paintings - my answer is why not. It is a logical progression for me and discovering new and interesting compositions of paint on canvas holds my interest.

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