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Meet Tim McFarlane

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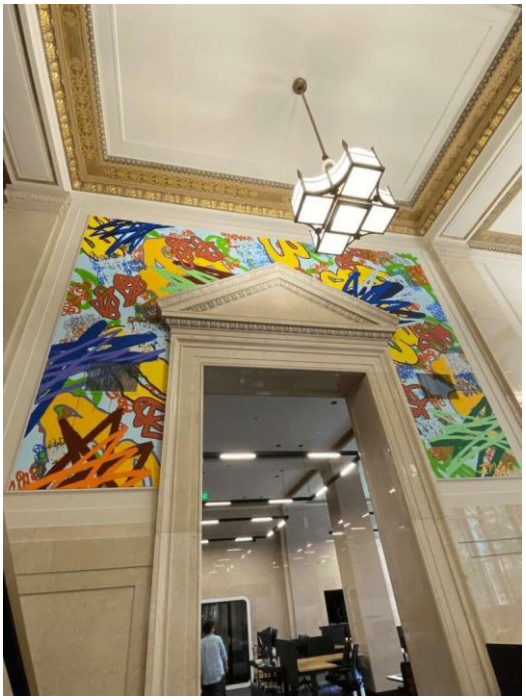
We caught up with the brilliant and insightful Tim McFarlane a few weeks ago and have shared our conversation below.

Hi Tim, thanks for joining us today. We'd love to hear about when you first realized that you wanted to pursue a creative path professionally.

I knew that I wanted to pursue a creative/artistic path professionally when I was in high school. When I was in the 11th grade, I was able to take the upper level art class and that pretty much started it all. I was a kid who did a lot of creative things, like randomly drawing, coloring and later trying to copy the art in comic books. When I got to that high school art class, I began learning more of the traditional ways of drawing, learning to see and interpret color properly, learning about composition and painting and drawing from life. High school is where everything came together for me as an aspiring artist, especially when I began learning about artists from bygone times, how they made art and lived.

I was particularly drawn to the freedom of art and the almost alchemical way that art can transform, through the hand of the artist, pigments from the earth into richly colored paintings and other works. I was particularly taken with how various artists from different times and places interpreted their worlds through images. Learning about the Impressionists and how they rebelled against tradition in the mid-late 19th century set me off on a lifelong exploration of color in my paintings and other works. I also fell in love with the romantic vision of going outside to do plein-air painting on location, attempting to capture constantly shifting light and color on canvas. I saw magic in that and adopted a similar approach, even while living in a city a century later. I knew then, that I wanted to be one of those people who “made magic” happen and create things that would hopefully bring some joy or at least ways of looking at the world differently to viewers of my work.



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As always, we appreciate you sharing your insights and we've got a few more questions for you, but before we get to all of that can you take a minute to introduce yourself and give our readers some of your back background and context?

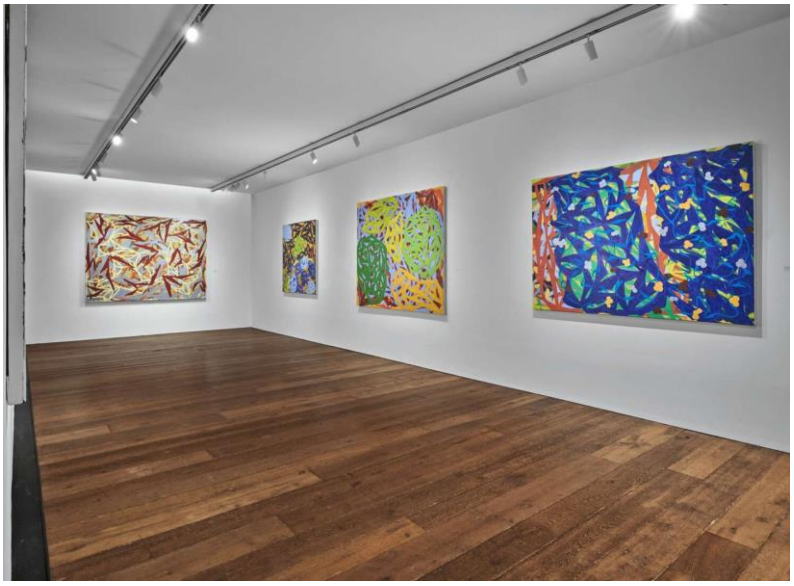
"I make paintings and works on paper that reflect curiosity about the man-made and natural worlds referencing direct observation, the unreliable nature of memory, as affected by time and movement" That's the closest to an elevator pitch that I have for describing my work to someone in a few seconds. It's pretty wide open, but it's one that I hope would spark curiosity, which is at the base of everything that I do as an artist. My own curiosity looks into how human beings navigate physical spaces we build, the natural world and the effects that the residue of our existence has on both physical and emotional (memory) states.

Art has been at the center of my life since high school. Everything I've done, including the jobs I've had, has been to hold space for art as the main pillar of my life. It's not ALL that I am, but it's certainly the main focus of my life. Looking back, I think my obsession with making images had its roots in my childhood. Being an only child and a relatively shy one, I think making art was my way of making myself felt seen as a person. That need to be seen planted the seeds of what would become my life-long pursuit.

My art journey "officially" began in high school and continues to this day. The work that I make now is resolutely abstract, but its roots lie in my high school education that exposed me to Old Masters through to the Impressionists. Later, I'd learn about Modernism, Abstract Expressionism and more contemporary art, but everything that I do is based on traditions of learning about color and to draw and paint from life. By the time I graduated from college, I had shifted from depicting the world directly to a much more open-ended expression of life as I saw it. Working abstractly provided me with a means to explore ideas that went beyond what I felt were the limitations of depicting people and objects.

There are no still life, landscape, nor portraits in my current paintings, but my work is still grounded in my observations of the world around me. I grew up in and still reside in Philadelphia. Being a dense urban area, the evidence or residue of everyday life are readily observable in the public spaces all around us. I'm intrigued by the myriad of ways in which people will establish that "I was here" through acts of graffiti, buffing (or erasing) that, installing a poster, someone tagging over that, someone ripping some or all of that down, revealing the many layers of activity on a space, There is usually a tapestry of color, line, textures and various materials that make up the visual culture of a city and much of that is reflected in my paintings.

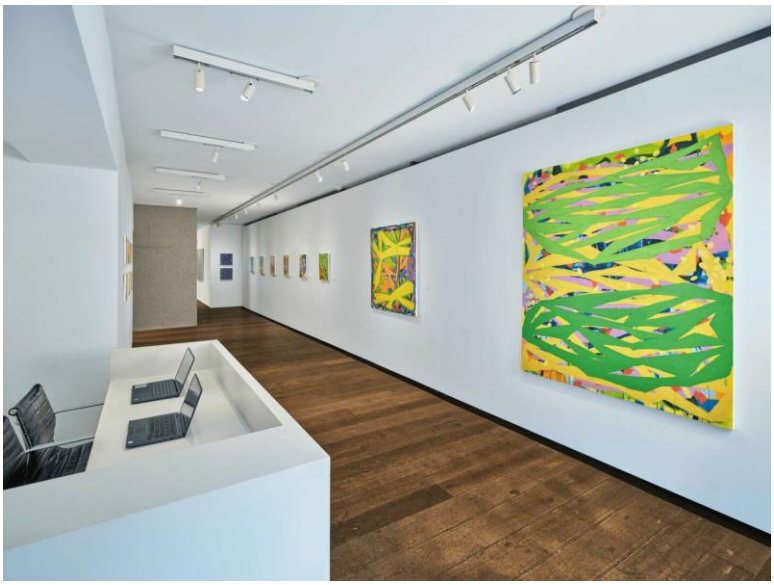
Besides the city as inspiration, I often look to the work of other artists, both old and new for insights into new ideas or to help me solve problems in my own work. There's no growth without learning and for a visual artist, looking at the work of other artists is one of the best ways to keep your own work and skills growing. I go to exhibitions to learn, but also to just enjoy or think about what I'm seeing. One of my biggest goals with my work is to incite curiosity in the viewer. Artwork that I feel rewards repeat viewing is what I look for and I try to provide that in my own paintings.



Is there something you think non-creatives will struggle to understand about your journey as a creative? Maybe you can provide some insight – you never know who might benefit from the enlightenment.

I think many people who haven't pursued art as their main focus in life sometimes don't understand the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes. They will see the finished result, but art not always be privy to all of the blood, sweat and tears that are part of making artwork. They literally only see the tip of the iceberg. The rest of it are the answering emails, writing proposals for shows, writing for grants and residencies, administrative tasks like maintaining/updating studio inventory, researching materials, researching sources of information related to your practice and artist statement, managing your social media, photographing artwork, packing/shipping artwork and, of course, making the work. Not to mention all of the life, family and day-job related obligations one might have, as well. Managing all of that on top of producing high-level artwork is nothing short of amazing.

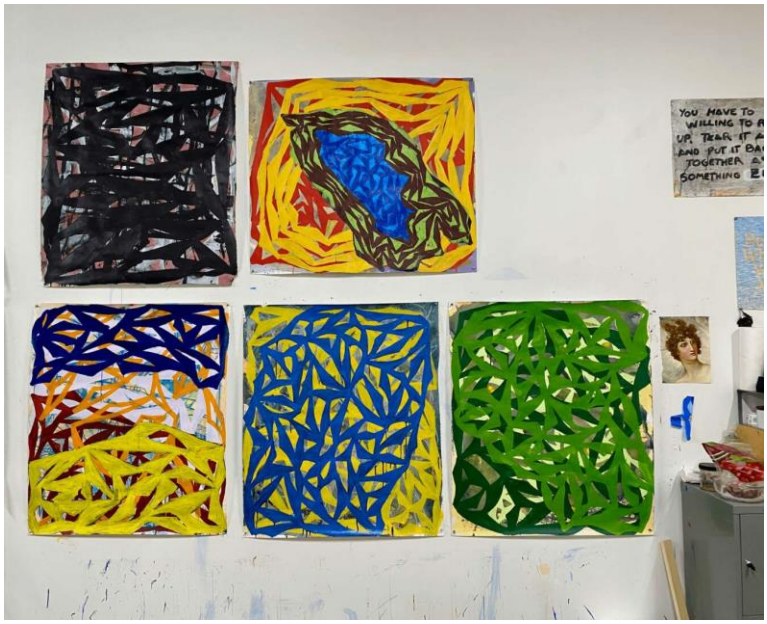
The mystery of what isn't seen can also deepen the meaning(s) of the work for the viewer. It's akin to being a magician and keeping some of the mystery of how it's done under lock and key and up one's sleeve. Without some mystery regarding a work's backstory about how it's made or other "giveaways", the work runs the risk of losing some of its magic.



For you, what's the most rewarding aspect of being a creative?

The most rewarding aspect of being and artist is, first, the magic of making work and, secondly, putting it out in the world to be a part of the cultural conversation, whether that's local on up to world-wide. Art allows us to express any number of things and can help us engage with personal and cultural ideas, philosophies and issues in ways like no other. It has the capacity to communicate with a wide variety of people, across geographic,

language and cultural barriers. The thought that I'm capable of sorting through and translating my ideas to a visual medium and perhaps have someone halfway around the world understand and, at the very least, appreciate the work is still amazing to me.

Putting your work out into the world for the public to take in gives it more lives than you might think possible. All viewers engage with art differently. Each brings their own particular views and ideas to the work and in turn, are affected by the art differently based on their individual emotional and mental make up. I've heard some artists say that bringing the work to the world "completes" it. I would amend that to add that bringing the work out into the world gives it new lives many times over, while metaphorically extending the life of the artist into the future many times over.

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