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Michael Steirnagle

American

When he worked as an advertising art director in the '70s, Michael Steirnagle also began his own graphic design studio, from which he launched an 18-year career as a freelance illustrator. "I designed a lot of fairly realistic album covers and book jackets," he says. When he transitioned to fine art, representatives that he had across the country as a commercial illustrator provided him with commission work for clients such as Chicago's Lyric Opera, Shedd Aquarium, and Field Museum; American Airlines; and Major League Baseball. He also created baseball and hockey cards for Upper Deck.

Continuing the fine arts path, he studied how Bay Area Figurative Movement artists (Richard Diebenkorn being his favorite) bridged the gap between realism and abstraction. "I wanted to paint people, but to be more expressive in my work," he says. He drew upon his experience creating book covers worthy of the stories they enveloped. "When I turned to gallery painting, I had to create my own problems to solve," Michael says. "I didn't want to just paint pretty pictures. Everywhere I go, I take pictures of interesting figures, not for facial features, but because of the way light is hitting someone and their body language," he continues. "Body language is important to me as a narrative painter. I want to invite the viewer to get involved in the abstraction and create their own narrative too."

Painting strictly in oil, Michael gravitated toward beach scenes and cafés or bars for settings. "I look for anything that's going to give me a lot of shapes to play with; because the more shapes you have to play with, the more abstract you can push your work," he says. "The less realistic the figures become, the more playful the painting can be, which really is my goal."

While he has turned to abstraction, Michael pulls from 25 years of teaching life drawing/painting at Palomar College in San Marcos, California, as well as in workshops around the state and at Scottsdale Artists' School in Arizona. "Teaching keeps me honest about my own work and pushes me further," he says. "And I am passionate about teaching. I like helping people get it." Though he paints men, most of his subjects are women — often in flowing summer dresses. "The fluidity of dresses offers a lot of motion and expressive painting, and they allow me to invent designs," he says of the patterned "fabrics."

He typically works from photographs, sometimes using multiple images to assemble what he calls "a mosaic — a puzzle of shapes. Abstraction is about manipulating shapes and the way paint is applied," Michael says. "More and more, I have built up paint. I like the idea of a lot of texture."

Originally from Texas, Michael headed west to attend the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, but ran short of money after two years and returned to Texas, where he earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Texas at El Paso. He eventually returned to Southern California and worked in an 800-square-foot studio in Escondido. "I bought a dog for company, but the studio wouldn't let me bring him there, so I moved [to Indian Wells]," Michael says. "Being from El Paso, I was naturally drawn back to the desert. The sunsets are truly amazing."

While his new environment in the Palm Springs resort region doesn't mean abandoning beach scenes, it has led him toward painting people around swimming pools. "I've also been influenced a lot by the architecture," he adds. "I live in a Midcentury Modern house, and they're fun to paint." The relocation puts Michael within a few miles of CODA Gallery and allows him to have his dog, Barney, as a constant companion in his home studio. The Australian Labradoodle is finding his way into paintings, such as Barney's Girl, showing the dog at the feet of a

woman lounging in a strapless print dress. "You find your muse wherever you can," Michael jests. The duo also makes music together. "I taught myself to play piano when I turned 60," Michael says, noting that he does not know how to read music but was given a piano by a student and now has two pianos (one in his living room and another in his studio). "I play every day," he says. "And Barney howls with me. He thinks he's singing."

Statement

"I paint people, color, abstract shapes and light. People are initially drawn to a work of art by its shapes, values and colors—not by the subject matter which is secondary. My hope is that the viewer will find pleasure in the arrangement of shapes, colors and textures of the painting as well as in its subject which emerges, disappears and re-emerges throughout the work."

Resume

Education:

Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX

Exhibitions:

CODA Gallery, Palm Desert, 2019

CODA Gallery, Palm Desert, 2016

Paul Scott Gallery, 2012, Group

Palomar College, 2005, Solo

Joe Wade Galleries, 2003

Blair Carnahan Fine Arts, 2003, Solo

Boehm Gallery, 2002, Solo

Adair Margo Gallery, 2002, Solo

Campagna Gallery, 1998, Solo

Adair Margo Gallery, 1996, Group

Palomar College, 1997, Solo

New York Society of Illustrators, 1990, Group

Los Angeles Society of Illustrators, 1991-1992, Group

University of Texas at El Paso, 1986, Solo

Awards:

Gold Medal, Society of Illustrators, Los Angeles

Gold Medal, Society of Illustrators, Los Angeles

Pat Nagel Award, LA Society of Illustrators

Selected Collections:

University of Texas at El Paso

Palomar College

United States Air Force

Colombia Health Care

Broadway Equity Fights Aids

Harcourt Brace

Trammell Crowe

Various private collections, California,

New York, Texas, Florida and New Mexico

Professional Experience:

Associate Professor of Art, Palomar College, San Marcos, Ca.

Freelance Illustrator 1975 to 1993

Art Director 1972-1976

Publications and Books:

"Sketchbook Confidential II", Northlight Books, 2012

"Southwest Art Magazine" Jan. 2011

"Art Collector Magazine" Dec. 2010

"Art Collector Magazine" Jan. 2012

"Billy Lazroe and the King of the Sea", Harcourt Brace Children's book. 1997

"All By Herself", Harcourt Brace Children's book. 1999

Selected Commissions:

Trammell Crowe

American Airlines

Pepsi

AT&T

Viking Books

Penguin Books

Houghton Mifflin

Harcourt Brace

Texas Monthly

Los Angeles Times

Major League Baseball