

ARTIST INTERVIEW - CALLUM FRANCIS

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Written and Interviewed by Atorina Saliba

Callum Francis's intense fascination with colour has come to fruition in the form of abstract art. The Brisbane-based artist is one of four who will exhibit at Dust Temple for the launch of Nation. We reached out to Callum to talk about colour, abstract art, and the art of experimentation.

Tell us a little about your artistic background and training. When did you start with abstract art?

I've had an interest in art and drawing from a young age, later evolving into a love for painting.

It wasn't until I went to university at ACU in Brisbane while studying literature and fine art that I was exposed to abstract painting. The impact it had on me was profound and it was immediately apparent to me that this was what made sense. I remember sitting in the first lecture on abstract expressionism, seeing paintings by Pollock, Rothko, Clyfford Still, Frank Stella and just being overwhelmed. The scale, the intensity and colour resonated with me.

I have a deep fascination with colour, paint as a medium and process of painting so it just made sense to me that I would pursue abstraction.

Your studio work uses dull colours while the outdoor piece you created for Silk and Squeeg bursts with bright colour like it's a Roy Lichtenstein. Each work evokes a different emotion, a different reaction. Is there an atmosphere you're trying to convey? What's the process behind selecting certain colours and media for each artwork, and at which point do you decide on the colour palette you'll be working with on a certain piece?

Colour is such a personal experience, and my choice of colour forms the basis to my response to either my environment or feelings evoked from my experience as a human. We see colour differently and our response to colours are based on our own experiences and ideas; this ultimately allows people to take what they wish from my work, extensive or minimal, limitation is defined by the self.

In the mural for Silk and Squeeg, I needed to use their signature yellow and deliver the feeling of busyness as it can get quite chaotic in there while screen printing; Vanja who is the owner, allowed total creative freedom with my impressions of those ideas. I also enjoy the works of Lichtenstein, in particular his exploration of the brush stroke. I believe all the paintings he made in that series were a brilliant combination of texture, form and colour. Fresh you mentioned him.

With my studio practice, I try to articulate/explore my own experiences and respond to my surroundings. I choose palettes by what feels right at the time, being in the studio is quite therapeutic and reflective for me; feeling or emotions are evident and dull tones are honest, there is no hiding.

Often overlooked by many of us, these pale or dull tones are taken for granted or not appreciated when encountered in our respective environments. Yet, we're surrounded by colourbond fences/houses, textured concrete, and Australian native

flora. I feel as though people look at sunsets and are immediately drawn to the vibrant colours, where for me it's the role that the duller tones play that is far more polarising. The contrast that the mauves, lavenders, and greyish blues provide the stability and composition for the oranges and pinks to shine; this observation is fascinating to me, the idea of balance and perspective is really thrust upon you.

The colours I select for my paintings are based on what I observe in my day-to-day life; whether it's the way light hits a surface, granite blasted bench tops, speckled driveways, or the texture of rendered concrete as well as the beauty of nature.

Is there a lot of experimentation involved in your process? Do you place time constraints on yourself?

Depending, I mostly play with texture and layering. I really enjoy the process of painting and the feeling of pushing painting across a surface. For me, the process is far more enriching than the outcome, the painting is alive while being painted and dead once completed. All that remains is the energy in which it has been applied with.

I naturally work quite quickly as spray paint and acrylics allow me to do so. Maybe it's from working outdoors for so long but it gives you the confidence to make those initial marks and then really dominate a surface, so generally each painting takes one to two days to complete.

Your works indicates a fascination with space, whether it's on canvas or walls or pottery. How much of your work is intuitive or pre-planned? Does it begin with an idea, a composition of colour, or something else?

I will draw the compositions and foundations of a painting first. These are quite rough on paper and I will do multiple drawings instinctually then I will go through and select the drawings to paint based on the feeling I had initially while putting that drawing together. Often the forms used in my paintings are deconstructed versions of objects, shapes, or characters. By abstracting those things, it gives me a sense of familiarity while building compositions. When I transfer that to canvas or pots, I let my natural ability dictate what will fit into the space, problem solving as I go or adapting to the surface as needed. In saying that, I do particularly enjoy working on larger canvases or scale as it allows for greater freedom and movement. Scale is fundamental to what I do as it provides impact. The larger the surface, the more it consumes the viewer to be immersed in colour and composition.

I will have a good idea on the colours that will be used and how they will be used from the get-go. When putting together the splatter paintings though there is a large element I cannot control, so I let chance dictate that.

What are you currently working on for the Nation exhibition launching on the 27th of February?

I have completed three paintings for the show with a similar colour palette used in each painting; royal blue is a feature colour that is present in each work. The colour palette was formed by the sunsets over the bay of 1770 and the feeling of being totally immersed in its beauty. Being present in those moments of admiration.

I'm also playing with levels of deconstruction, the painting Blue Monday is the deconstructed version of what I'm exploring in the other paintings, leaving just the blue as the last layer sitting on top of the splattered/static grey and silver which is the first layer.

ARTIST BIO - CALLUM FRANCIS

Callum Francis is a 25 year old artist based in Brisbane, Australia. Coming from a background in working outdoors, modern techniques such as spray paint are incorporated with traditional acrylics in his studio practice. Textures, colours and patterns are key elements to the aesthetic of Callum's painting, often drawn from the surrounding environment of the urban landscape and nature.

Colour is both expressive and representative. Rather than orchestrating a predetermined storyline or agenda through painting to enable a quality of understanding, the work is an expression of self and one's experiences articulated through form, colour and composition.

Callum's composition and palette enables the viewer to absorb his paintings through the lens of lived experience or perspective; ultimately allowing the viewer to take what they wish, extensive or minimal, limitation is defined by the self.