

MACKY BLISS

Bar Rat

My main influences are usually the people who surround me, and the experiences that I face because of those people. Working as a bartender has directly impacted my art. Faces, expressions, emotions and behaviors intrigue me. Bartending allows me to be a participant in and observer of many unique human interactions and social codes that I use as material for my work. I often photograph the people I interact with, especially while bartending, to use as source material.

For a while I was focusing on extreme emotions such as grief, but I have become more interested in the nuances of people's underlying feelings and behaviors. An example of this is a moment of introspection that flashes across a man's face, or a hand gesture that a woman makes when telling a funny story. These instantaneous seconds of unguarded display are difficult to capture on camera and they are so ubiquitous that we rarely recognize them while they are happening. For me, work is most satisfying and deliberate when I am driven by specific psychological content, and the images I collect at the bar have been propelling me in this direction.

I have been working mainly with oil paints for the last few years, but more recently I have been experimenting with other media including ink, gesso, pastels, acrylics, and collaged paper. Working with the materials I have on hand to create a compelling composition is a challenge I relish. I feel as though I am solving a problem when I use the tools I have nearby to make an interesting piece. There is an unfinished quality that flows through all of my pieces, regardless of how carefully considered they are. I am attracted to the rawness that is created by this unadorned formal practice. In my work, I cultivate a compositional playfulness and spirited mark-making.

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In small, quickly-executed portraits, I try to capture the most important aspects of the person's expression and features using strong ink marks and free flowing gesso. Causing strange reactions between materials is something I incorporate in my oil paintings. Combining pours or drips with more controlled marks, as well as loose pastel drawing, creates a variety of textures that pull the viewer's attention to the piece's focal points. Specifically, in my bar paintings, using varied formal techniques are a way to signify individuality among people, and emphasize different emotional tones.

I hope to bring a new perspective and emotional impact to the age-old topic of bar life and public scenes, while speaking to the art of the past. I'm particularly interested in Edouard Manet's images of leisure in 19th century Paris; Adriaen Brouwer's ludicrous and expressive paintings of debauchery in the 17th-century Netherlands; and German portraits from the 1920s by Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and George Grosz. I work at examining my own moment through pictures of social behavior in the tradition of the painters I admire, and I try to allow a viewer to experience a specific moment in a person's life. That moment could be one of intense emotional pain, confusion, or even some kind of action. Whatever instant of time I hold up in a piece, I want the viewer to connect it to his or her own life.

Bloody Nose is the Icing on the Cake, oil and pastel on canvas, 30" x 40", 2015



What's Wrong? Nothing., oil and pastel on canvas, 60" x 50", 2015



Untitled, oil and pastel on canvas, 44" x 56", 2015



Untitled, ink on canvas, 8" x 10", 2015

