

MICHAEL FLOHR

TODAY'S
TOP
ARTISTS

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"All I do is paint every day. It is an obsession, I can't stop," says Michael Flohr, a 27-year-old artist whose modern impressionist paintings of bar and café scenes and rainswept city streets offer a social commentary of our times.

"I can tell different feelings and attitudes you get from people—from their faces and conversations—and I blend their figures and gestures," he says. Nightlife in cafes mirrors the social status quo, he observes. "You get a lot of views on what is going on in the world, hearing what people are saying. A man earning

a million dollars sits next to someone who can barely afford the beer they are drinking—so many different worlds come together in a bar or café."

To some extent, Michael paints rather than writes his social commentary. "I'm not the best writer," he admits. "I have these great thoughts and they come out better on canvas than as the written word on paper."

His board, square, brushstrokes, creating almost a mosaic effect, obscure the figures in his paintings, leaving an illusion of the characters depicted to tell the story in vivid, pure pigmented colors through their gestures and subtleties.

As a youngster, Flohr took his notebook everywhere and drew. Later, he enrolled at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco where he experimented with all types of media and artistic styles. In his final year in college, he was accepted into New York's Society of Illustrators and the following year, the society awarded him the prestigious Herman Lambert Scholarship. In 2000, prior to graduation, he was honored "Best in Show" at the school's spring exhibition for his painting "Irish Coffee." That piece, together with two others, was later selected for exhibition at San Francisco's de Young Museum.

After graduation, Flohr toured Europe, which led him to pursue his desire of capturing the nuances of social interaction, city



"Fontaine's"



"Across the Board"

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nightlife and cityscapes in his artwork. "Seeing strangers intermingle in unfamiliar places is an inspiration to me," he says.

Another source of inspiration, Flohr's wife Melissa, is seen in many of his paintings—a figure in a red dress in the 1920s style that she favors, recognizable only by her shadow and mannerisms. He likens this effect to squinting your eyes in a crowd. The details blur and become simplified down to the bone structure.

"I'm the guy in a café," he says, "noticing a beautiful, warm, orange-violet light chipping on people's faces across the room, and immediately thinking of ways to combine color and capture that moment in my next painting." Sometimes he is with pencil and notebook, sometimes a camera. Observation is everything to him—whether seen, heard or read. "It is all connected to that which can be processed into a visual," he says.

He sketches the "moment" as a scene unfolds, often in charcoal. Many times, these sketches become works of art in themselves. Back at his studio in San Diego, he works in oil like the Impressionist artists through history that have inspired him, enjoying the richness it brings to the canvas. Often he paints late

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— *Michael Flohr*

into the night, listening to jazz and blues, kept company by his dog and cat.

His style has been described as a cornucopia of avant-garde, abstract expressionism, and impressionism. "I love the colors of Cezanne and try to make some of them for my own paintings, adding a contemporary twist," he says. He has also studied the works of Monet, Pissarro, Manet, Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec.

He also admires the structure and boldness of Michelangelo, the sculptures of Rodin, and the restricted brushstrokes of John Singer Sargent.

"I want to show that a painting doesn't have to be challenging," he says. "It can just be something that pleases your eye. It doesn't have to have a meaning. You don't have to dissect it. Enjoy its beauty and what it brings to you."



"Luck of the Irish"



"Italian Rain"