

## ‘An Unquiet Mind’

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St. Mark’s exhibits the oil paintings of Bradley Kachnowicz



by **Jules Masterjohn**

Having a conversation with artist Bradley Kachnowicz is a bit like looking at his paintings: thoughts move from one interesting point to the next with passionate energy in the same way one’s eyes dart around the surfaces of his richly textured and brightly hued canvases. Only some of his paintings, though, fit this analogy, for the artist has developed a number of styles in which to express himself.

Interested in a diversity of approaches, his paintings range from representational works, where he renders butterflies and birds in a recognizable manner to the abstract, concerned with formal elements and emotional expressivity. These styles, however, share a common quality – each of

## **‘An Unquiet Mind’**

his paintings’ backgrounds is composed of vibrant colors, gestural marks, lazy drips, and/or energetic brushstrokes. His current exhibit at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Durango helps the viewer to recognize the continuity in his various styles. From the loose and gestural “Coyote Waits” to the representational “Butterflies,” and “Pattern Migration” landing somewhere in-between, Kachnowicz has cultivated a language of color and mark-making rooted in abstraction.

Influences from historical artists can be found embedded in his canvases. Claude Monet’s lively brushstrokes inform his work, and Mark Rothko can be sensed where one color hovers ever so subtly over another, creating a seductive illusion of three-dimensionality. Kachnowicz feels the freest and the most connected to his inner nature when he is painting abstractly. “Abstraction is the truest expression of the individual artist,” he offered. His mark-making is visceral and palette engaging, showing rich and lush surfaces made from highly saturated hues. It is obvious that he likes to paint.

He also likes to sell paintings, and though many of his works sell before the paint is dry, his representational work has been his most lucrative. “To make (a painting) more legitimate for others, I add the representational images, and it allows for focus within the work.” He has noticed that people’s tastes are varied, so he works in a variety of styles. “I’ve never limited myself to anything.” He has one client in Florida who commissions Cubist-influenced paintings, another who likes work that is flavored by Marc Chagall’s themes, while Durango’s Wildflower Antiques has had great success selling his bird and butterfly paintings. Kachnowicz is versatile in his ability to create paintings that reflect varying modes of expression, and he offers a little something for everyone.

Included with his 14 paintings at St. Mark’s Parish Hall is a display of reproductions of his work from the last 10 years. It is a useful guide to understanding his artistic development. Essentially a self-taught artist, though he studied art in high school, Kachnowicz has been a good student of the modern masters and has learned well from them. Of these influences, he offers, “They have done all the work before us. My addition is texture, and combining many influences to come up with something unique.”

Though many of his aesthetic influences come from the 20th century, he departs from the modernist tradition in how he approaches his work – he begins each painting by first deciding on its name or title. His painting titles are often inspired by a line from a song or from a book, such as *Desert Solitaire*. Nearly all his works begin in this way.

One recent painting, “An Unquiet Mind,” had its genesis in a line from a book about Buddhism. Intrigued by the phrase, he decided to make a painting of it. In that work, a painting’s structure and composition begin with five to six layers of freely applied acrylic paint or gesso, followed by the addition of ground sage plant to the wet paint. After this initial textual foundation, he blends another 10 to 15 layers of oil paint on top of the textural base before the painting is finished.

His imagery emerges during this process. In “An Unquiet Mind,” a band of birds positioned across the bottom of the canvas didn’t seem right, so he painted them out and added a row of apples. Still not satisfied, he settled on a line of words. Kachnowicz’s creative process is a dialogue of sorts in which he has a conversation with his painting. How does he know when a painting is finished? “Well, like any artist, I just do.”

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A skilled painter, Kachnowicz knows his aesthetic influences and is articulate about their contribution to his work. As a 21st century artist, he understands the necessity of cultivating not only his artistic and philosophical foundations, but also in developing marketing skills. He is serious about his art and just last week, he received the big pay-off: he became a full-time artist, leaving behind the non-art related work that has kept him from the studio. Knowing that the studio is where he wants to and must be, Kachnowicz balances passion and pragmatism into his daily routine-one part artist, the other part businessperson. His advice to other artists: “Get in the studio every day ... even if you just go sit there and don’t even touch the paint.”