

An artistic voice in Greenpoint

Abstract painter & local artist Mott McCampbell's work on view at t.b.d. on Franklin St.

Dear Greenpoint: Don't take offense at what I'm about to write. It's just that it's been quite difficult to find your artists. I had an idea that they existed, or at least I suspected as much, but gathering proof has been quite a chore. Perhaps I haven't been trying hard enough. Perhaps I've been focusing too much on writing about art openings and haven't made the connection that art doesn't just hang on gallery walls. Either way, this week made me realize that until now, I've failed miserably at capturing Greenpoint's artistic voice.

Mott McCampbell isn't new to the neighborhood. An abstract painter with years of work under his belt, Mott has been living in Greenpoint since the early nineties. No, he didn't jump on the "Let's move to Brooklyn-Bandwagon" when Williamsburg and Greenpoint became hip. No, he doesn't wear pants two sizes too small. He's just a local artist who lives and paints in an affordable studio off of Franklin Street, alongside other struggling artists who've so far stayed under the radar despite the fact that their zip code has become synonymous with words like "hipster." I'm not saying McCampbell isn't hip. I'm actually saying the opposite: that he's one of the few artists I have met for whom the term hip actually applies. Let's just say he's a cool guy and an inspiring artist.

So you're wondering, where can I see his work? It just so happens that this weekend was the opening of an exhibition of his latest works at t.b.d., Greenpoint's newest lounge, located at 224 Franklin Street.

"I think that t.b.d. lends itself to art," said McCampbell when I met him in his studio a few days before the opening. "I like the idea of people sitting with a beer for long periods of time and living with the paintings."

The show, which will be up until the end of May, features works he has done over the past year. When asked if there was a theme for the show, McCampbell said there wasn't. "The works are all untitled. I have secret titles but I don't want to direct someone's vision when they look at the work. I want them to experience it for themselves."

It's this open and almost ego-less perspective on art which, in my opinion, really separates Mott McCampbell



Untitled painting by Mott McCampbell.



Mott McCampbell, masked, at his home in Greenpoint.

Photos by Rebecca White



Mott with one of his newest paintings, now showing at t.b.d.



Burg 'n' Point

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from so many of his contemporaries. "I have a lot of optimism," he said of the art world in general. "I think there's a lot of art to be made. I don't like when critics write something off as being abstract."

Did this mean that his works, most of which were emotional pieces with powerful brush strokes, fell into the category of "abstract"? As I looked around his studio — a room in his apartment dedicated solely to painting, a room with no door which is kept safe from his dog by a ganny cart he rolls back and forth to block its entrance-way — I felt there was no other word I would use than

abstract to describe them. Was I being simplistic?

"Right now I'm only working with oil on canvas and there are absolutely no recognizable images from life in my recent works," he said. Of his artistic influences, he said that they change depending on where he is with his art.

"I'm a night guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, so I've seen so many exhibitions over and over. It's the next best thing to owning the art. It's inspiring and I know it's affected my work in a good way."

But he made sure to let me know he is his own artist. "When I paint I'm not trying

to mimic dead artists, but I'm being inspired by their work so I can do my own thing."

So what is his own thing?

"For me, art is always about pushing a painting to the edge, to where it's just about to fall apart. There's a certain attraction to defeat," he said. "But as an artist you have to have faith when you start a painting that you're going to get something that will reflect your thoughts. Faith without religion, that is."

When I asked McCampbell about his view on the ever-increasing price of rents in the area, he responded in a fashion unexpected, but just as refreshing and down-to-earth as his artworks.

"They're building luxury condominiums right next door to us. The clock is ticking. We'll probably be forced out," he said matter-of-factly. "It happens, though. What's the point in getting angry about it? There's always



Untitled painting by Mott McCampbell.

going to be little corners where artists can go. You just adjust."

Mott McCampbell's works will be up and for sale at t.b.d. for a month. If you missed McCampbell's opening on April 26, there's

another one around the corner. McCampbell's boyfriend, painter Edward Leonard, is having an opening at t.b.d. on May 31. Hope to see you there!

Send comments and tips to burgnpoint@courierlife.net.