

DEAN MITCHELL ALWAYS EMPHASISES THE PART OF HUMANITY IN HIS MODELS. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, HE TALKS ABOUT WHAT MOTIVATES HIM, HIS COMMITMENT AND HOW HIS PASSION IS GUIDED BY HIS HUMANIST LEANINGS.

An extra dose of harmony with Dean Mitchell

Artist at work.
29 x 45.5 cm.





Carrie Mae.
51 x 38 cm.

Likeness is fine if that's what your after. I'm interested in getting totally lost in the moment of painting, capturing something that can't truly be repeated. A rare moment that only I have as a human being. It's like painting is life and life is painting. I will never pass this way again. It's like trying to hold onto time which is basically impossible. This is what I truly love about being creative. It's all about the time and the moment.

**Quincy
Plant Worker.**
51 x 38 cm.

The people I choose are often family members, friends or strangers on the streets. There are times when I meet people at a social gathering and a conversation about their lives gets me thinking about painting them. I'm mostly driven by my connection to the subject.





Bob at the Easel.
51 x 38 cm.

My artist friend Bob Ragland from Denver, Colorado has become one of my favourite subjects lately. I've painted him many times over the years in a miniature format. Lately I have become more interested in doing some more major works of him. I've truly enjoyed painting him. He's been such a positive person in my life, both in regards to my work and personal growth as a human being. He is truly a kind soul who loves art and artists. All he talks about is how artists need to be supported because they are an important part of history.



Waiting for the Bus.
51 x 38 cm.

When I'm painting I don't think about technique at all. It's all about trying to capture emotional content, and a fleeting moment in time. Sometimes there is something in my subject's eyes; the sitter's body language or attitude. Sometimes the subject has lived a long strong life and has a powerful presence. It's a beautiful moment when the artist's hand and mind meet the subject on a spiritual level.



Hazel Mae.
38 x 45.5 cm.

I find painting people I know more comfortable. Repeated observation allows me to study them in more detail. It feels different with a stranger. There are times when a stranger reminds me of someone I know and that pulls me in emotionally to a greater extent. I have noticed that most of my models are elderly people. I'm not sure why that is other than I was raised by my maternal grandmother so I seem to be drawn to painting more mature individuals.

Urban Cyclist.
30.5 x 35.5 cm.

If you are able to tap into that energy, emotional content is a huge part of creating great works of art. Sometimes when I do a painting I just can look at it and know there something more in it and at other times it just isn't there.



DEAN MITCHELL A.W.S.M.



Casual Moments
in Ybor City.
51 x 38 cm.

People have commented on my use of neutrals: this is the key to capturing the tenderness of my subjects. There are multiple layers of colours applied very thinly and delicately. This is where the real feeling comes in. This is the heart and soul of my work, the subtle transitions of colours combined with a strong sense of abstraction that forms the real.

“Emotional content is very important”

Dean, your paintings have a strong impact with bold value contrasts and simple shapes and colours, combined with an emphasis on your model's attitude and posture...

I have always felt that the real power in art isn't to be found in technique, nor does it lie in traditions handed down from the past. Such elements can influence you in different ways, however it is up to the artist to go deeper into the thought process of creating powerful images. In my case, the power comes from growing up in the segregated South, watching and studying people interact with one another. Living in that environment has informed my choice of subject matter, which I felt needed to have a voice in American culture. When I attended Columbus College of Art & Design in Ohio, the city's main museum was just a short walk from the campus. I had never been in a museum before and I was surprised that there weren't any coloured people to be seen on the walls and yet there were all of these masterful portraits and paintings of other subjects. This has been my driving force: to achieve technical mastery, so that when people view my work, they can sense my skill as well as my deep connection to my chosen subject.

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KEY FACTS

Dean Mitchell grew up in the city of Quincy, Florida. After studying at Columbus Art & Design College in Ohio, he worked as an illustrator for Hallmark Cards before deciding to focus on painting. In the early 1990s, he began to win awards and in 1997, he won the gold medal at the American Watercolor Society annual exhibition. A 2002 article in the 'New York Times' described him as a "Vermeer of the modern era".



There are evident parallels between your art and that of Andrew Wyeth, but to me, to a non-American at least, what strikes me the most is that your paintings have an unmistakably American feel to them. Is that something you try consciously to convey?

I will say this about the Andrew Wyeth connection: I became familiar with his work and that of many other American artists after spending time in the library at the Columbus College of Art & Design. I had never seen so many books on art in my life and I was like a sponge. I was into everything from impressionism to realism and from abstraction to expressionism. However, when I came across Wyeth, I was like WOW! Here was an artist who painted black people and he was white! I couldn't find a single art book on a coloured artist in the whole library. I had never seen an art book that had that many black people in it and they were not painted by another black person. It was a strange feeling and one I can't explain. I learnt later about the works of Henry Tanner, but it wasn't at the college library. I learnt about him on my own after researching coloured artists and why they weren't represented in museums. I can tell you for certain that after reading so much about how they were treated, I wanted to give up and return home. That's just how depressed I became about this dark chapter in American history.

Now that may seem strange to some people who see themselves reflected in every art form, including movies and on magazine covers. I grew up seeing black music and sports personalities, but even they didn't make the cover of magazines unless it was Ebony or Jet.

How would you rate tradition in art? Do you think an artist should try and break with tradition or, on the contrary, use it as the foundations of their work?

Personally it's never been about tradition for me, it's about freedom, the freedom to choose any method or approach that I want to. And if I feel the need to change, for it to be on my terms and mine alone. I'm not into chasing the next new and different thing, but I am into finding ways to better communicate my ideas about the world around me.



Bob with the morning Paper.
76 x 56 cm.

I think the more we learn, the better we are, just as long as our imagination remains open to new ideas. Breaking away from what has become comfortable can force us to grow in new ways. However I think knowledge of the past can serve us well when looking at old ideas in a new way. The old will always intersect with the new and vice versa .

Is it important for you to project your feelings into your paintings and do you think you are successful in using painting to express your ideas?

This is an interesting question because it's an inescapable part of the process for me. If you are able to tap into that energy, emotional content is a huge part of creating great works of art. Sometimes when I do a painting I just can look at and know there something more to it, and at other times it just isn't there. It's hard to define, but you know by the reaction certain works get from fellow artists and some collectors with an eye for content. I don't think a lot of paintings turn out the way we imagine them at the start. They can fail to meet up to expectations, but that's fine as it keeps you pushing to improve their quality and emotional content. You can't always pull things off the way you want. Sometimes I'm surprised when revisiting works that didn't meet my expectations - with a confident approach, sometimes it all works out fine and at other times, I just have to put the painting into what I call my gesso pile.

When painting portraits, what do you feel is most important, likeness or atmosphere?

Likeness is fine if that's what your after. I'm interested in getting totally lost in the moment of painting, capturing something that can't truly be repeated. A rare moment that only I have as a human being. It's like painting is life and life is painting. I will never pass this way again. It's like trying to hold onto time which is basically impossible. This is what I truly love about being creative. It's all about the time and the moment.

Are there any particular types of models you like working with?

I find painting people I know more comfortable. Repeated observation allows me to study them in more detail. It feels different with a stranger. There are times when a stranger reminds me of someone I know and that pulls me in emotionally to a greater extent. I have noticed that most of my models are elderly people. I'm not sure why that is other than I was raised by my maternal grandmother so I seem to be drawn to painting more mature individuals..

How would you say your painting has evolved over the years? Where do you see it going in a few years time?

Growth is always subtle, but I see a more painterly and spontaneous deeper abstract quality emerging. I feel it may become more impressionist and more abstract. It seems to be occurring naturally, it's just moving in that direction.

Have you ever had a creative block?

I've never had that problem, but finding time to do some of the ideas I have in my mind is more difficult. If I do experience some less drive to work, I try to find subjects that remind me of how fleeting life is. Finding subjects that have deeper meaning and purpose makes me want to get back to doing what I love which is painting.

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