

CULTURED

15 MINUTES WITH DAN MCCARTHY

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Dan McCarthy's Beach Fire, 2015

Dan McCarthy, the California-born artist long known for his sunny oil and acrylic figurative paintings of men and women with elements such as surfboards and rainbows, is the subject of a solo show in Los Angeles. The exhibit—at Venus Over Los Angeles, the newly opened West Coast outpost of Adam Lindemann's NYC gallery Venus Over Manhattan—includes a series of large ceramics called **Facepots** and canvases shaped like lightning bolts, surfboards and road signs. One of the earliest artists to head to Williamsburg 25 years ago, McCarthy talked to *Cultured* about leaving the city a year and a half ago, the importance he places on making his work accessible and how his new show (running through Nov. 1) seeks to tap his childhood in the California surf town of Huntington Beach.



Dan McCarthy next to *X-Ray Spex*.

Your Facepot ceramics have a freehand quality to them. What's the process of making them? I make the work really quickly and I try and imbue them with the sense of spontaneity. They are these large vases that I make by hand and they weigh about 90 pounds. Mostly it's an experience that I'm making. The work is like a record of my making it. And the record of it is just this spontaneous vase. It gives them a feeling of lightness.

How do you describe the paintings in the other room at the gallery? They are lightning bolts with clouds and lightning bolts with word balloons and the word balloons say things like 'stoned again' or 'Hawaii', where I was born. They are all shaped canvases. They remind me of signs and homemade skateboards and homemade surfboards from when I grew up in Huntington Beach, California.

What are you trying to capture about that time? It's just a really interesting time in my life. I really want to capture if not the period then just the spirit. Huntington Beach was still ratting in a way back then. You could still see parts of the 50s. The buildings were from the early 20th century. It still felt a little old and creaky. It was before things got too gentrified in a way. Things weren't too expensive. It was easy to park a car. It was easy to ride a bike. Money didn't prohibit you from things there and the beach was wide open. People were there but it wasn't anything like in the 80s and 90s when it got more crowded. The spirit was just a kind of freedom and the chance for things to happen. I like the work to feel accessible too. I want them that anybody can access the work whether it's a child or an art expert or someone completely outside the art world.



Smoke Signals, 2015.

It seems like using paint on your ceramics is part of that too, no? In the ceramic world in general they don't use paint on ceramics. University teachers don't use paint on ceramics. Generally ceramicists finish their pots with glaze. I think the issue is that ceramics get stuck in technique and the technique perpetuates a mindset. I'm trying to push these boundaries of these objects can be. I'm trying to reorder or expand the possibility of what painting can be or what a ceramic piece can be. You can paint on ceramics. You can paint on marble. You can paint on canvas. It all works.

What is the idea behind the patches on some of the canvases? They indicate a passage of time and acknowledge the distance.

Where are you living right now? I was in Williamsburg for about 25 years. I moved to upstate New York about a year and a half ago just outside the town of Catskill. I just needed more space. I went from a studio that was about 1,500 square feet to now a studio almost 10,000 square feet. So I have a huge place up here and I have privacy and trees. So I can work you know kind of seamlessly. I have a floor to make ceramics, a floor to make paintings and I can move through all these zones kind of unencumbered. In the city things were so constrained by space that you just spent a lot of time organizing space. It's actually three floors. I have a floor where I live. It's an old repurposed building from the late 19th century outside of town. It was a school and a jeweler had converted it.

Did moving upstate affect your practice? It was huge. All the work in the new show was made upstate. I was moving to a place with space and a type of a freedom so it directly impacted the work.



I'm always curious what other work creative people are looking at. Who are some artists whose work you find inspiring right now? The California ceramicists Peter Voukos and Michael Frimkess. Dorothy Iannone, an American artist living in Berlin. The New York artist Peter Saul. And Billy Al Benston. I specifically like his 1960 to 1969 work, the bent metal enamel paintings.

What were some early breaks that brought attention to your career? I was in a show with Jack Pierson and Mark Flood, a three-person show at Anton Kern in 1999 or 2000. That was like my first show in New York. That was a big show and was organized by Jack Pierson. He knew Anton and later I became represented by Anton Kern. My work was figurative painting and they were paintings of people.

What was Williamsburg like then? It was great. I moved from the city and I was near the waterfront and empty buildings and cars that were burned out and upside down. I moved in 1989. My rent was like three or four hundred dollars a month. It was really really cheap. It was amazing. It was really cool. I wasn't the first generation of artists to move there. I think in the 80s some East Village artists went over. Williamsburg has about three layers of people that have come in and out of there. By the time I looked around before I moved upstate almost everybody was gone from 25 years before. Most of my friends had moved. Interesting there's a lot of people who have moved upstate from the city. There are people you haven't seen in the city for 10 years; it's because they moved up here. It's kinda great. It's not like moving to the country and being isolated. There's still a connection to the city. Though the social piece doesn't really exist unless you make it happen.