

Darrell Roberts

For me everything is about art all the time. In the 1950's, art critic Harold Rosenberg coined the term action painting. It's a phrase that I keep coming back to. My practice is as much about the act as the action. The finished painting is a physical manifestation, or residue, of the action. Rosenberg's definition of art as an act rather than an object, as a process rather than a product defines my studio practice well: applying paint, scrapping it away, layering, and accumulation. Although my paintings are seemingly abstract they are rooted in my everyday experience.

The ever-changing landscape and structures of the metropolis inspire my work. Over the years I have documented Chicago; the lake, the gardens, the skyline, its people and construction sites. All these elements and textures influence my work. My interest is in sensory overload and stimulation. I grew up in a small rural farm in Iowa. I remember going for long walks through the fields and woods, contemplating what is out there. Today I live and make art in Chicago. I still go for long walks, through an ever-changing environment, which influences my art making. I contemplate the same questions I did in my childhood, and wonder why and how a lot. I believe some of us, artists, are born with a creative energy and soul to make art. I am bombarded with visual stimuli in Chicago, and love it; I believe more is much better. The pace of people, traffic and hectic life make it easier for me to notice the subtle changes of textures, colors, forms and light as I move through the city. These changes quickly catch my eye and give me a moment to rest. Many times I spend much of the course of a year, documenting construction sites and am interested in what was and will be.

My painting process is not dissimilar to the continual push and pull on the growing metropolis; as crews raze a structure so others are building new projects. In the way a mark is applied, a color is laid down and then scrapped up and moved away, only to let another layer build-up the painting.

Color for me is movement; movement through the city is color. A big influence on my practice is Hans Hoffmann whose push-pull theory owed much to his surroundings. The tension of space, form, line and color all ring true in my process of painting.

The elements of nature give many structures in Chicago a nice patina. Flakes of paint chip off buildings, leaving behind a history of paint strata on the structure. Rust becomes more dominant on boxcars as they haul commodities from Chicago to the west and back. The city gardens are full of intense colors and textures in the summer. My paintings have much to do with these observations and a keen sense of sight.

In my workspace, I cover the walls with the images I document, colored papers I have collected with different patterns and textures to bright toys filling my studio. There is so much influence in my space the eye can hardly rest; it is intense energy and colorful happiness. I work on a series at a time, as many as fifteen paintings. Sometimes laying down the background, other times scrapping away and covering it up, each time adding more texture through the thick layers of paint. Over the course of months, my abstract paintings are razed and built-up. My canvases are opaque and full of color, texture and visual stimulation. Steeped in the tradition of oil painting, my paintings are best seen in multiples to get a sense of the sensory overload and rapid eye movement on a subject with the subtle changes. My paintings stimulate the viewer's senses, which can give off a sensory overload. My life is art and molded around life.