

BETWEEN THE LINES

Cathedral City artist **Ryan Campbell** creates controlled chaos in segmented line works.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LANCE GERBER**

Ryan Campbell's studio is a bit unconventional. A rainbow of spray paint bottles sit on the shelves, and a respirator peeks out from beneath an in-process artwork. On his table, there's a ruler with pencils taped along various inches, as well as pieces of a picket fence – both serve as stencils for measurements.

Campbell uses these tools to create intricate line segment paintings on everything from wood panels and corrugated metal to linen and canvas. He most recently expanded the approach to a sculptural practice that brings the work into three dimensions. His Cathedral City studio is filled with various pieces that are both intensely graphic and mathematically precise – the lines meticulously thought out as they intertwine.

"The work I am making involves the invocation of energy and power, balance in chaos and remaining true to oneself, undeniable honesty in making intentional marks," Campbell explains. "It also involves the idea of healing through color, depth and focus. I find at times being drawn into a calm, meditative state while studying certain works, specifically the monochromatic pieces. The color work is all about projecting positive visual stimulus in hopes of elevating serotonin levels. Color makes people happy."

It's easy to get lost in the vibrant works as you walk around the studio, even more so when Campbell reveals his backstory. He was born with several congenital deformities and currently suffers from complex partial seizures – he's also impaired by scotopic sensitivity syndrome in which "black gets drowned out" by white.

"Because of the syndrome, my brain processes the white as the dominant piece of information being read," he explains. "I have difficulty with white overpowering my perception of darks."

So, he'll typically rely on a black base in order to see the colors he layers on more clearly. Perhaps that's why he's so drawn to contrast, in color and optics. "I like to see an effect that is intentional, not just a brain glitch," Campbell says. "It's also a way for me to share some of what I experience on a daily basis. Oddly, it kind of makes me feel normal looking at these works because

I know the viewer is having a similar visual experience as me." Further, Campbell pictures his hard-edged sculptures in gardens, where the lush background juxtaposes with harsh shadows.

"It's about interaction," Campbell says of his work. "Some of my paintings are very stark and very broad and direct. But the color pieces, there's definitely an idea about coexistence."

Inspired by artists like Ed Moses and Agnes Martin, he's trying to "tell a story through color and form and shape." Engage a conversation about design and composition – building layers. Some of his textures even attempt to emulate the sides of old buildings. "Very Banksy-esque," he quips.

That's where his art used to live – on the walls of Los Angeles where he was born and raised. He was drawn to graffiti at a young age and started painting at Venice Beach in the mid-90s. He likens his time there to the development that happens during art school; Campbell learned art and design fundamentals on the streets.

"I don't think I could have developed that way through art school," he explains. "I don't necessarily have an easy time doing the academics." Instead, he was mesmerized by the dedication and



tenacity of crews like AWR, CBS and MSK. "I will absolutely say I was a troublemaker growing up," Campbell laughs. "It saved my life in so many ways."

He still sees graffiti as "a defining art form of our time," but notes a strong separation between it and street art. "I don't condone vandalism," he says. "It makes me sick when I see all the stuff in Joshua Tree, people tagging on rocks." Now, he takes what he learned and applies it to his contemporary practice. While his line segments started out strictly structured, they're evolving to become more fluid and loose.

"Paint bigger and loosen up," he says he learned from mentors Erik Alos, Russell Jacques, Gesso Cocteau and Phillip K. Smith III. In newer works, Campbell is focused more on subtle cues, creating organized chaos with a lot more nuances coming through. The result is an aesthetic for a new generation of viewers. All of us captivated as Campbell throws caution to the wind. 🍃

SEE THE WORK

Check out Ryan Campbell's mural at **Desert Regional Medical Center**, dedicated to his father-in-law Dr. Samuel Landau, who was a practicing cardiologist there for more than 40 years.

Corner of East Tachevah Drive and North Via Miraleste, Palm Springs

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