

MICAH OFSTEDAHL



We had the pleasure of sitting down with Micah prior to his upcoming solo exhibition, *Signs of Life*, taking place Saturday, August 14th 2021 with us at Ryan Joseph Gallery.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR STUDIES, YOUR PASSIONS.

I was born and raised in Austin, MN. I was a pretty quiet kid and was happy to spend time alone with art or building stuff with Legos or model cars etc. Art classes were always my favorite but I started taking art more seriously in high school and took as many art classes as I could. I ended up graduating with a Bachelor's in Fine Arts with a focus on sculpture and ceramics though I always had an interest in painting. I also had a passion for music and played in a band through college and a few years beyond, so art was on the back burner for a while. Once the music ended however, I got right back into painting. Not really knowing where to start, I found inspiration in a Grey's Anatomy book as I found the structures and patterns fascinating. To balance the sedentary, indoor life as a painter I try to get outside as much as possible hiking around southwest Oregon to refill on creativity and inspiration.

THE TITLE OF YOUR SHOW IS SIGNS OF LIFE; WHAT IS THE INSPIRATIONAL SOURCE FOR THIS CHOICE, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

I honestly don't remember when, or why those words popped into my head. It may have been a song or something I was reading, but it hit me as a simple but appropriate and all-encompassing title for this collection of paintings. My paintings are a blend of inspiration from unusual Earthly life forms and imaginary, mysterious elements rather than obvious life forms such as human or animal figures. I want the viewer to be immersed in the landscape.

WHAT AUTHORS, ARTISTS OR WORKS OF THE PAST & PRESENT DO YOU DRAW
INSPIRATION FROM OR ADMIRE?

I remember being inspired by M.C. Escher at a young age as he was one of the artists, we studied in grade school. Salvador Dali was a big inspiration in high school and opened me up to believable surreal landscape paintings. I didn't spend much time going to museums or galleries or studying art which I think allowed me to develop my own style. I took several art history classes in college but I can't say much of that inspired or influenced me in a direct or tangible way. I think music, particularly Pink Floyd, has had some sort of influence on my work. Thankfully, by the time I got on Instagram I had already developed my style. I am more directly inspired by nature, whether it be live and in person or illustrations from Grey's Anatomy or Ernst Haeckel, or microscopic imagery.



TELL US ABOUT THE WORKS OF YOURS THAT YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE LANGUAGE YOU USE.

You may notice I have a couple of different styles. One that developed a couple years ago over the course of two or three paintings. But I think they represent similar concepts. In a nutshell they represent our observable reality and the ethereal mysteries of the universe. The painting "The Mind's Eye" separates these two by showing some basic elements of science in the floating red bowls such as a hexagonal pattern, a water droplet, a photon, a crystal, etc. This is juxtaposed with the free-flowing spiraling pattern in violet which represents mystery and creativity. These two elements of the painting come spiraling together with an explosion at the center which branches off and smaller clusters of explosions emerge. This pattern was based on a map of the universe showing different densities, so a fairly literal representation was drawn here with the observable scientific world meeting up with the unknown to create the universe. All of my paintings have some combination of these elements. Regarding my other style of work, I have taken a more realistic approach for the landscape or "cloudscape" background, again representing our observable reality. To represent the mystery and the invisible forces of the universe I am using clear water or glass-like patterns to distort the background. My paintings "Traces of Pneuma" and "Finding a Center in the Clouds" are examples of this.

HOW HAS YOUR ART EVOLVED OVERTIME?

It depends on how far back I go, but I would say I started developing a style in college while working on ceramic sculptures, wood carvings and plaster. I also hit a milestone in life-drawing classes when our instructor asked us to include 100 figures on the page. I finally felt like I had the freedom to do my own thing rather than drawing yet another representational figure. Instead, I narrowed in on parts of the figure that struck me and started laying those on the paper one by one and combining and blending them with my own elements. This would later inform my paintings a few years later when I used anatomical illustration for inspiration. Much like the figures, I took bits and pieces of the imagery that stood out to me and added my own creative components and arranged them in somewhat of a cross-section landscape. I would soon come across the 19th century biological illustrations of Ernst Haeckel and my sources of inspiration grew beyond anatomy to other biological forms, often microscopic and mysterious looking organisms. More recently, I began using realistic landscapes as a background and laying over the top a clear pattern which distorts the background.

FINALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ART AND HOW YOU FEEL AS AN ARTIST AT THIS POINT IN HISTORY.

It's a very interesting time for art and artists. I feel like there is a lot more opportunity for artists to show and sell their work because of the internet and social media, and I think that leads to a lot more artists being artists, or trying, which is a good thing. I think it can also lead to some people trying to copy other artists, especially those that are, or seem successful or have a lot of "followers". This isn't necessarily a bad thing as it can be fine to copy artists you admire when you are just starting out as long as you eventually branch off and find your style. These opportunities for exposure can also lead to artists truly doing their own thing because it's so much easier to find your niche and for them to find you. You shouldn't feel like you have to appeal to the

masses in today's environment just to find people who resonate with your art.

It's also an interesting time for art because it seems like everything would have been done by now but then someone can still come along and surprise us. Combining technology and science with art is something new to watch out for.

