

# Beyond Abstract

MATT DURANT



A conversation with artist Matt Durant can cover a lot of ground, from the benefits of living and working in Leslieville, “there are a lot of things going on in a small area, and people are really into supporting a small idea, whether it’s business or artists,” to the conceptual framework behind the art that he creates.

Wherever the thread leads, there’s a commonality behind the ideas: a respect for the planet, “reconsidering what is garbage and what is not, and the way we consume,” and the practice; “I have some suppliers that get wood from old barns and buildings in northern Ontario, trees that fall down in Toronto, and harbour wood from the old Queen’s Wharf they uncovered last summer.... and I find stuff in the dumpster.”

He says, “When an inspiration comes, it’s often from finding the wood and seeing it, and getting ideas from its character. A lot of the finishing and painting choices I make come from the way the wood is speaking already. I want to glorify that. I want to honour the wood. If it has interesting crags or knots or nail-holes, or stains, any kind of erosion, whether it’s man-made or weathered, often I’ll leave those parts as they are and then I’ll kind of work around them, and help to amplify them. I rarely have a notion of what a piece is going to look like in the end. A lot of times it changes completely through happy accidents, or purposeful accidents. It takes on a life of its own. That excites me.”

As Matt and NL move through his studio we can see that although many pieces are ‘source-driven,’ a compositional aesthetic drives the narrative. It’s this aesthetic that moves the work into the dimension of fine art and away from the merely useable. “That’s bought ply, and that’s more of an exercise in the materials and the stains. I make my own stains that are pigment and alcohol-based. That allows me to get those crazy bright colours. I’m still interested in learning about the materials as I evolve, so sometimes I do work that’s about a composition, rather than about the characteristic of the wood - so there are all kinds of things going on.”



We look at a huge, bold, resin-treated abstract. “That’s an ongoing series. That’s like the fifth one of that red series, so I do kind of know what it’s going to look like, because of the nature of me being very gestural and quick. The way that the paint lands is always going to be different from piece to piece, and then I make decisions of dots, for example, afterwards.

I have another series of pieces at the Rouge Concept Gallery that are my drop-sheet series. When I’m doing these paintings I generally do them on the floor, so I can make a mess. The overflow paint that goes off the edge of an on-going work gets captured on these giant canvases underneath over a long time - like 6 to 8 months. I have lots of space here so I have multiple ones going. This is one I chose when I had paintings that have blue in them. You can see it’s really detailed, and some of them are more mixed-up with different colours. It’s also a completely different looking piece of work for me. It’s canvas and it’s more about the paint, but it still falls in line with the idea of not wasting anything.

Certainly the workspace at 50 Carroll St is uniquely suited for the multiple on-going projects that consume Matt. Huge, 20 foot walls from its factory days give space to view completed pieces, while the quirky workshop areas hold big tables for painting, drying and wood-working.

His work can be viewed on his website: [www.mattdurant.com](http://www.mattdurant.com) and at the Rouge Concept Gallery at 732 Queen St E. But, because it excites him to feel a person looking at the world differently by engaging with his work, he’s more than happy to have viewers visit him in his studio. As he says, “Knowing more about it can only come from me.”

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