

## Q&A: Laguna Beach artist Chris Richter on his new O.C. exhibit, his 'real job' and nature

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**Q. What is your style of art?**

**A.** Abstraction. Minimal to an extent where color and form are concerned.

**Q. You say the process is the key to your art, describe it?**

**A.** The process starts by looking and exploring. I start by going on a hike and bring pieces of nature back to the studio. Based on the colors, I start applying layers and layers of paint on the canvas or panel. My process is a direct relation to the source or concept of my work as it relates to the environment. When I think of human impact on the environment, I see disappearance through climate change, human destruction and fire. So when I build up a painting in its many layers of color, I use a reductive process of taking it away as a direct reference to what is going on in the environment. There is also a sense of covering up and then revealing, which again refers back to the idea of how we as humans impact our environment.

**Q. What inspires your creativity?**

**A.** Nature and the elements of nature. I look at details to see color and form and use those details to extract specifics for direction.

**Q. What should the viewer take from your art?**

**A.** A sense of understanding where the work comes from and the depth of the work itself. It is very physical to make. I can only make the work as its meaning for me, the viewer will have their own experience with it and therefore I try not to put too much emphasis on what the takeaway should be.

**Q. You were well-established in Santa Fe, how did nature influence your art there?**

**A.** I had an experience early on in the development of my work in which I was hiking in the National Forest above Santa Fe and the snow had created a blanket of white covering all of the colors of the landscape. The only thing left were the black eyes of the white aspen trees and they were all looking at me. I felt then that I had a spiritual connection with the trees. They would inform my work for years to come.

**Q. Has it changed in Laguna Beach?**

**A.** From the aspect of the trees, no. I look at eucalyptus trees in much the same way. While much more subtle, they too have eyes and the skin (or bark) is somewhat the same. Peeling, velvety smooth in some instances and rough and textured in others. I find the colors fascinating. I've been told the leaves are very oily and a perfect conductor for fire. Intriguing that I have some work pertaining to forest fires, burn scars, and the unfortunate beauty of the aftermath, the devastation. I started painting water several years ago solely on the time I had spent here in Laguna Beach.

Prior to moving here, I always had to rely on photographs and memory for water reference once I was back in the studio in Santa Fe. Now I can walk out to the middle of my street, take a look from my porch or deck and look out at the ocean for any reference.

**Q. When do you know you've made it as an artist?**

**A.** That is a tough question. There are probably differing levels of achievement for various artists. But I think the reality of selling my work is very validating. Knowing someone would like to live with a picture I have made and the time, effort and energy I put into it is so close to me and my being.

**Q. How has being in marketing and graphic art influenced your fine art?**

**A.** Conceptually, composition, which is a huge creative aspect of work comes to mind, and plays such an important role in the look and feel of each painting. Discipline from the corporate office / agency setting gave me the experience of showing up for work and being responsible for my work and my work only. And maybe a great benefit was that I had and continue to have the experience of being able to market myself and my work.

**Q. How hard is it to make it as an artist?**

**A.** It can be very hard at times. When things are selling and exhibitions are happening you feel like it is the best thing ever. When things are slow you wonder what else could I go do? Trust me, I have thought about my options several times over the years.

**Q. Do you work on several pieces at a time?**

**A.** Yes, I can work on multiple paintings at a time and when I am working on an exhibition I mix and reuse paint from painting to painting so in the end all of them have a distinct connection with one another. Some even have an underlying color sensibility.

**Q. What is your ultimate goal as an artist?**

**A.** First and foremost, making a living. After all, it is my job. But also, I think every artist dreams of the ultimate exhibition and being in the most prestigious collections. The competitive nature within many of us wants that. But in the end, if I can look at a painting and know I've made something meaningful, I have an indescribable sense of joy.

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