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### Colin Chillag- Get Real

[0 Comments](#) 27 February 2015



*Spotlight on Phoenix-based artist Colin Chillag in advance of his show "Anti-Realism" at the 101 Exhibit.*

By Daniel Barron

The art world is often concerned with the creation of "realism." How much detail is there? On a technical level, how can a piece be assessed in terms of its fidelity to light and form and color? Is that enough to make something real? And on a thematic level, is a piece "real" in that conveys with deep personal truths? How does one define that? What is "realness" in art when truth is, by nature, often entirely subjective?

The impossibility of realizing objective truth in a pictorial representation is the dilemma that forms the bones of Phoenix-based artist Colin Chillag. As a designated "hyperrealist" painter, Chillag strives to represent his surroundings in a heightened context that values emotion and memory over simple aesthetic accuracy. He creates visions that are more real than real, and in doing so embraces the folly of recreating what photographs can already depict so well. As observers, Chillag invites us to see truth through his eyes, his pieces an impressionistic collage of sketches, underpaintings, color mixing texts, and notes-to-self like roadmaps through the highways of the mind.

Chillag got real with *Yay! LA* about his process in advance of his solo show, "Anti-Realism," which opens Saturday, February 28th at the 101 Exhibit.



*Many of your paintings feature mundane elements such as deserted gas stations and tourist destinations. Where do you find the beauty in those subjects? What speaks “art”?*

One of the recurring intentions behind my work is the idea that everyday experience, or things of a seemingly mundane nature, are fully fascinating if you pay attention to them. So, I do often seek out commonplace or seemingly inartistic subject matter, like Circle K gas stations. Or I will go to places like the Grand Canyon not to photograph the landscape but to photograph the tourists.



*Your work contains many loose sketches, notes, to-do lists, color mixing tests, etc. Are they largely intuitive and improvisational? Describe the moment when a painting is truly “done”?*

Yes, in many ways the areas you mention serve as a kind of counterpoint or maybe a remedy to the tedium of the realistically rendered areas. These areas develop in relation to each other over a period of months in many cases.

“Doneness” for me as a painter is no easy matter. I am not trying to render the entire surface of a painting in a predetermined and stylistically consistent manner, but there are a few conditions that seem to be required for me to call a painting “done.” One is what you might call the saturation point. It’s the point at which I feel that I have fully considered and addressed and resolved every part of the painting, even the seemingly empty areas. I need to feel that the work is imbued with effort and intention, and there is no shortcut to this point. It has to be earned and it often involves making decisions, and taking risks, and making mistakes, and struggling to find solutions to problems, and dealing with all the attendant emotions related to the struggle for something you care deeply about.

The other condition is the formal composition of the work. For me, composition in painting mostly just means balance. I am always trying to balance the painting out. I want it to be dynamic, and visually rich, and also balanced.



*How did the rawness of exposing your thought process in your paintings turn into a sort of signature? Was it intentional or a style you discovered on accident?*

This part of the work developed slowly over a period of years. About eight years ago I made a very conscious decision to focus exclusively on realist or hyperrealist painting. I had previously been a more pluralistic kind of painter, I mean realism was in my oeuvre but it was just one among a number of different ways of painting that I would regularly cycle through. So, in this very sincere attempt to develop as a realist painter I really felt like I was confronted with some of the fundamental contradictions or ironies inherent to representational painting. That is, you are creating something entirely illusionary – deceptive in a sense – in order to convey something you believe to be objectively real or truthful, and part of that illusion, perhaps the most interesting part for me, is this attempt to sort of freeze a moment in time. It's this process by which you spend untold moments of time, sometimes months, trying to depict and make permanent a single instant in time. It often feels the most pathetic and delusional thing possible. Problematic, but also fascinating, and always challenging.

Anyway, one of the ways I tried to resolve some of these contradictions was by exposing the process as much as possible. I felt that if I am going to engage in this illusionary process, if I am going to depict these images of the frozen past, I want to present them in more of the present-tense of their creation. So it started out with just little color swatches and underlying pencil sketches and notes about technique, but gradually evolved to include other areas of my life.



*Is the capturing of “truth” in your art best represented through creating realism or projecting the subjectivity of the concept expressionistically?*

Yes, good question. There is a constant back and forth between the calculated and objective realist rendering and the more expressionistic and spontaneous or “abstract” areas. I’m not sure which is more truthful but the contrast feels honest to me.



*Your paintings are inspired by your own photographs. Is this a pursuit you spend a lot of time refining? What are some of your favorites subjects to shoot and why?*

I take a great number of photographs, but I wouldn’t say this involves much refinement. My photography exists only in the service of my painting and I really look for a kind of amateurish quality in the images I choose to work from... Like a snapshot you might see in a family album. I sometimes think of what I do as an attempt to turn a bad photograph into a great painting.

## 101 / EXHIBIT



*Is there anything new stylistically or thematically that you wanted to try with this new series for the 101 Exhibit?*

A lot of the subjects and techniques in this show feel for the most part like a continuation of a pattern of working that has been developing in the last seven or eight years. There is a lot of room for experimentation and spontaneity in this way of working, so, there is always new stuff going on. After many years of painting, I feel like I have found some very rich ground.



**101 / EXHIBIT**



**101 / EXHIBIT**



# 101 / EXHIBIT





101 / EXHIBIT



## 101 / EXHIBIT



*“Anti-Realism” opens at the 101 Exhibit on Saturday, March 28th and runs thru April 18th.*

*View more Colin Chillag artwork on the 101 Exhibit [website](#).*

### **101 Exhibit**

8920 Melrose Ave,  
W Hollywood, CA 90069

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**Daniel Barron** - who has written 122 posts on [Yay! L.A. Arts & Culture Magazine](#).

Rudderless college graduate Daniel Barron founded YAY! L.A. Magazine on a love of writing, passion for the arts, and a firm belief that people really like talking about themselves. He contributed to a number of publications, including LA Music Blog and the defunct The Site Unscene, before deciding to cover arts and entertainment the way he wanted to read it. He works as a freelance writer and digital PR consultant in his current home of Los Angeles. Follow him on Twitter at @YayLAMag.

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