

COLM ROWAN FINE ART

Bret Reilly

Artist Statement

I love to create snapshots of everyday life—reflections of recognizable moments. My art encourages the viewer to laugh at themselves and the world we live in. After spending the majority of the past year and a half secluded due to the pandemic, this body of work needed to be carefree and whimsical—to celebrate the return to normalcy, getting outside, feeling the breeze through your hair, hearing laughter again. And with masks finally coming off, seeing smiles again. There is a stage-presence energy that embodies my work—a quality that attracts the viewer's eye like they are being entertained rather than just looking at a static piece of art. For figurative work to be successful, it must resonate life and breath through movement and energy.

My pieces reflect my personality and, as a result, have given me a recognizable style. The use of real shoes on my figurative work has been my signature incorporated found object. In fact, it's become more of my signature than actually signing the pieces. The colorful shoes are the exclamation point that initially draws the viewer in. From there, it is my responsibility and challenge to get their attention away from the prop and allow them to discover the emotion of the piece. But I know I am not the first artist to use real objects like shoes in their work.

As a young child, my mom often brought me to the museums in New York City. I was captivated immediately at the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Degas' "The Little Fourteen Year Old Dancer." There she was, captured forever in bronze, yet wearing a skirt made of real fabric. I knew then that I was an artist and that there were no rules or restrictions—art is the complete freedom to express myself by making something with my hands, however I want to make it. I put sneakers on the first sculpture I made in art school in 1985 and never looked back.

Mom gets credit for exposing me to my heroes—Degas, Rodin, Giacometti. Dad gets credit for the white. Architects never retire, and at 87, Dad is still creating. He built his dream house in 1967, the year I was born. It was a four-story round house on stilts, built on an enormous rock. Every bit of wall, floor, and stair was painted white. Like my father before me, I was raised with a minimalist eye. Painting my work all white allows the viewer to discover the overall movement and emotion. Similarly, leaving the faces void of too much detail allows the viewer to finish the piece themselves—to recognize someone they already know captured in the mood and gestures of the sculpture or to introspectively see themselves mirrored in the faceless characters. My favorite paintings are the ones that evoke a much larger experience than what is physically painted on the canvas—where an artist’s expression becomes a different realization for each person that encounters it—and that is what I strive to bring to each of my sculptures.

I find my work situational—exploring moments of day to day life that most people have experienced themselves—going to the beach, waiting in line, or in this case, relaxing on a swing. In a time where technology is rapidly changing and more and more clouds of fear loom over the human spirit, I find reflecting human emotions through simple topics comforting and engaging.

What’s with the empty swings? Those are unfinished pieces that allow the viewer to imagine someone in their own life sitting in the empty seat. Once they visualize who is swinging, I can bring them to life as a sculpture inspired by their personal experience.