



# Mindscales: Noah Becker Interviews the Cool and Famous Painter Ryan McGinness

By Noah Becker



Installation view, *Ryan McGinness: Mindscales* at Miles McEnery Gallery.  
Image: Christopher Burke Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, NY

I finally found an opportunity to interview Ryan McGinness, the rather famous New York artist we all know and love. He has a new show called *Mindscales* featuring 72 paintings on at New York's Miles McEnery Gallery. The exhibition runs from October 15th to November 14th, 2020.

**Noah Becker: When you make paintings are you planning them or working intuitively?**

**Ryan McGinness:**

I rely heavily on intuition.

Intuition is a way to quickly access accumulated information in the subconscious.

Intuition is like a muscle memory.

I can get to a point where I know without having to contemplate.

My paintings grow.

I have some idea of where I would like them to go.

I usually start with thumbnail sketches of the compositions.

But, they always go off on their own.

I go back-and-forth from simple picture planes with often only one element, to full-bleed, all-over visually viscous overlapping forms that smother the surface.

And, sometimes, in-between.

I let the painting lead.

I follow the painting.

The painting unfolds according to its own logic.

At its best, my painting process is automatic.

I'm along for the ride, trying desperately to hold on.

A painting is a recording of a human spirit having occupied a specific space-time.

Every decision made during that recording is a fate determinant.

Every move informs subsequent moves.

This is in stark contrast to how I approach the tightly controlled technical drawings I make that are used in the paintings.

With the individual symbols, I work toward solutions.

The paintings, however, are results, not answers.

**Becker: What elements do you feel make for a successful painting?****McGinness:**

I get hung up on the "isness" of a painting.

Sometimes I think that is all that is required for it to be a good painting.

Does it have enough of those mysterious qualities that make it irrefutable?

Does the painting deserve to exist?

Sometimes I sit back and think:

I just want to make the coolest painting possible.

That's all I really care about. Of course, there are more romantic desires layered on top. And, more convoluted reasons for making my work. But it really starts with just wanting to make something cool.

Cool is the most valuable currency and cool is what I value.  
That comes from having grown up in Virginia Beach.

Are you cool with that?  
Just be cool with people.  
That's a cool painting.



Installation view, *Ryan McGinness: Mindscapes* at Miles McEnery Gallery.  
Image: Christopher Burke Studio. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, NY

**Becker: How do you think about color in your work?**

**McGinness:**

All my work starts in black-and-white.

My sketches and drawings are developed in black-and-white.

The individual symbols are black-and-white.

My compositional thumbnail sketches are in black-and-white.

I use color very intuitively as a way to activate the painting—a way to plug it in.

The paintings are electric.

My paintings are false-color paintings.

After all, what color is a symbol?

These are paintings of things we have not seen before, so we don't have a shared color vocabulary for my subjects.

I'm adding artificial coloring.

My colors are experiential. They can only be fully appreciated in person—in real life.

The experience is the result of the physical properties of the pigments.

The colors reflect a broader range of the light spectrum than can be recorded.

I use fluorescent, pearlescent, metallic, iridescent, metal leafing...

These paintings are designed to undermine their own reality when reproduced.

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