

“Post-show Interview with Toronto-based artist Kathryn Macnaughton”

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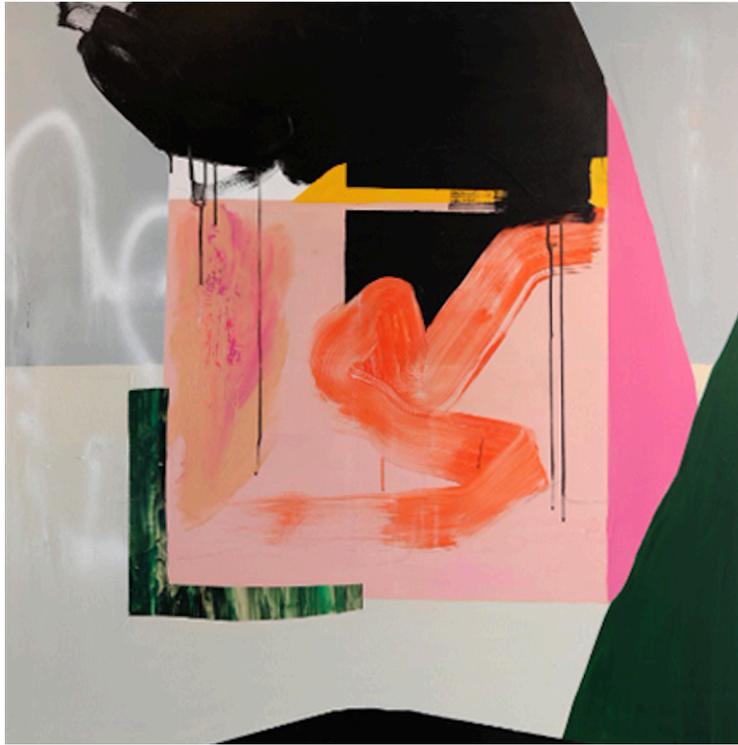


Twenty-nine-year-old Kathryn Macnaughton currently lives and works in her native Toronto. We caught up with her after the close of her successful exhibition at *HUNTCLUB*, entitled “Blue Note,” to learn more about this latest body of work and what makes her artistic self tick.

District-W: There’s a lot of pressure on artists to deliver a new body of work that surpasses their previous show in scope and in execution. Does that pressure get to you? How do you manage those expectations? And how do you approach building upon previous work, maintaining your style/aesthetic yet creating something new/original?

Kathryn: I put a lot of pressure on myself. I’m definitely my worst critic and I think the pressure that I experience is for the most part based on an internal struggle. Working on this body of work was much more difficult than I’ve experienced previously. My vision was more conceptualized and I also wanted to refine it aesthetically. It’s minimal and graphic, which was a challenge. Your aesthetic has to come naturally and from an honest place. I think that’s the key to originality.

District-W: It’s often said that there are no more original ideas, only innovations or adaptations of previous work. Do you believe this?



Kathryn: I struggle with this all the time. It's very difficult to know when something is original and completely yours when we are constantly inundated with pictures and information in our society. I get so overwhelmed. It drives me crazy when I think something is all mine and then I come across a similar idea on the internet, posted somewhere on social media. I do believe that there are original ideas though; and I think that if it comes from an honest place, even if it has been done similarly in the past, it can be seen as original.

District-W: How do art history and/or your contemporaries influence your work? Did they influence this show in particular?

Kathryn: They have always influenced my work. I hardly look at my biggest influencers' work anymore (Hockney, Rauschenberg, Matisse). It naturally will show itself in my paintings with out me even realizing, but I do think less so in this show than in my last one. It's interesting to notice that the influence of other artists diminishes as your own work progresses. I'd say I'm more inspired by other artists' work rather than influenced by them at this stage.

District-W: What has led you to work in acrylics? What about working in this medium allows you to best convey your message?

Kathryn: I've always worked in acrylic. I'm not sure why. I think I'm just comfortable with that medium. I like that it dries fast and I also like its permanency. Once a brush stroke goes down it's much more difficult to move the paint around. I think I tried oils once, but it drove me crazy because I kept on losing the parts that I liked when I tried to fix other areas!



District-W: I admire your use of such bold colours – something that can easily go wrong for a painter. Can you explain the meaning behind the title of the show, “Blue Note?” I appreciate the jazz reference, but how does that tie in? Or was the colour choice purely aesthetic? Or does it represent something else for you?

Kathryn: To be honest, the name of the show was a last minute decision. I’m actually not that pleased with it, but I was struggling to come up with a name and it was the closest to what the show represented. I was listening to a lot of jazz when I worked on this series and I think the spontaneity of the music is very similar to the process of my work. That bold blue in the work was how the show really began to come together. That blue was all around me. I began noticing it everywhere and my brain just loved it! I couldn’t get enough of it. I even began wearing that bold blue. The warmth and energy from that colour made me very happy. It’s such a difficult blue to work with. I struggled with it at the beginning but I began to understand how to use it with other colours, which was a really gratifying experience. I love bold colours, but it’s very difficult to work with them and find the right balance.

District-W: Creativity isn’t something that can be turned on at will. How do you manage creative blocks? What do you do to get yourself out of a rut?

Kathryn: BE PATIENT. It’s so frustrating when I have a creative block. Before this show I had one for 3 months! I think the best thing to do is to start experimenting – discovering new materials and processes. Happy mistakes usually lead to breakthroughs!

District-W: Your piece, “Between One Fern,” really stood out for me in the show, as I felt it clearly demonstrated your ability to balance abstraction with hints of recognizable imagery; it also employs a clever use of space and colour. What drew you to combine these motifs (fern and female form) with the abstract blocks of colour? Can you elaborate on this piece specifically?

Kathryn: This work was influenced by a piece I did for a group show last year (it’s on my website, Natural Instinct). This is where my work is slowly transitioning. I’m a commercial artist as well, and my graphic work plays with the power of sex. I love the nude body and the graphic shapes it creates, which can translate well in my plantings. The foliage began to influence my work from my travels in the last few years. I love how luscious they are and they create these beautiful organic shapes similar to the nude body.

District-W: There’s always been a partnership of sorts between the artist and patron, between art and finance. How do you feel about this relationship and how do you handle/balance being true to your creative self while relying on those creations to support yourself financially?

Kathryn: I’m very lucky that I get to be creative full time. Doing the commercial work does help with my finances, although I would have to say that the abstract work isn’t falling that far behind. It’s really nice to be doing both and working in two very different media. I find my digital work can help me understand composition in my abstract work. The textures and expression from my painting can help me in my graphic work. The two worlds are colliding more and more, which is really nice to see.

District-W: How much of your work is autobiographical? Artwork is always personal to a degree, but are you more inclined to be introspective or reflective of your environment or of others’?

Kathryn: I ask myself this question all the time and I’m still not really sure. Subconsciously I think my past relationships and experiences are definitely in the work, but I do believe that it’s also taken from the stories I hear and my surroundings. The work is VERY personal. It’s an emotional roller coaster for me because it has to be honest and true. It’s a very hard thing to explain. I sometimes feel like I’m in therapy when I’m painting.

District-W: Technology (advent of internet, social media, etc.) has led us to be cognizant of public and private spheres and continued encroachment on the latter by the former. Does this concern you with regards to your work and how you’re seen as a professional artist?

Kathryn: It’s not really something I think about that often as I’m not overly active on social media platforms. At this point I think the work is still very new. Maybe down the road I’ll have more of an opinion on this, but at this point all I really care about is creating the work that helps me grow as a human being and hopefully some people will enjoy it. It’s a personal journey for me.

District-W: Everyone’s a critic. Critique is a vital part of being an artist and developing personal style/aesthetic, but it can also be quite difficult to accept. Have you learned to deal with it well or is it a necessary evil you’re struggling with?

Kathryn: It’s definitely a struggle, but a good one. I love how critical I am of my work and I can honestly say that I love it when people are critical of it as well. It keeps me wanting to create and push forward. I think the key is to not be too attached to the work. It’s a process and if you can analyze and accept your weaknesses, you can learn and move forward.

District-W: What do you ideally hope to accomplish through your art? Do these aspirations tend to lean more towards the aesthetic? The political? The personal?

Kathryn: Presently it's definitely more personal, but I'm sure that will change over time. I can already see that my more conceptual graphic work is starting to seep through into the abstract stuff.

District-W: Future plans: has this show helped you to envisage your next body of work? Do you have any future plans or concepts you'd like to share with us?

Kathryn: I'll be exploring this body of work more. I think it's just the beginning and there seems to be a lot of legroom for it to grow. Expect more nude graphics and foliage in the future.