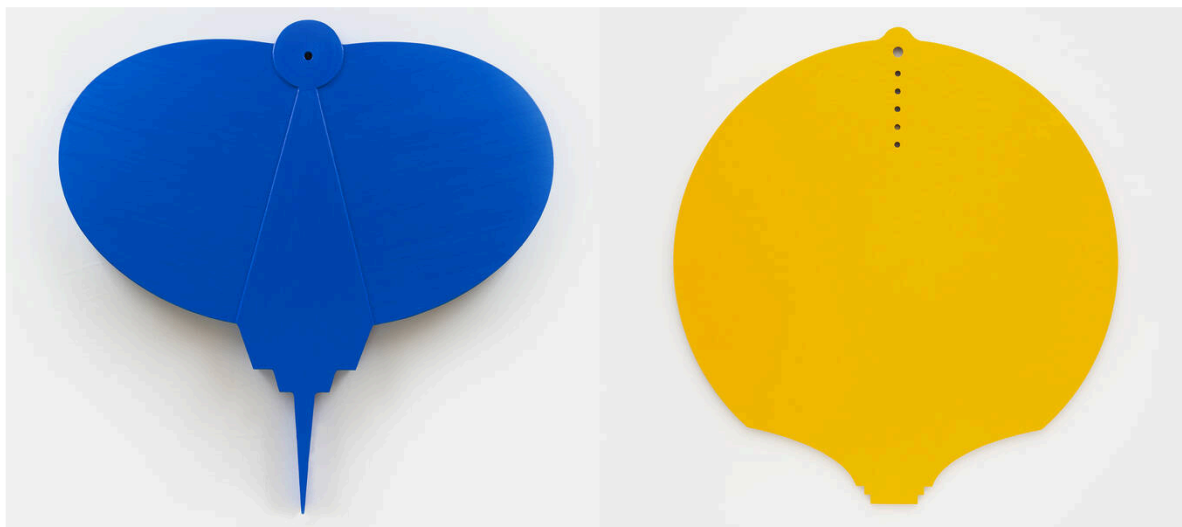




DOT MAGAZINE



Ponosta (left), 2019, by Grad Art alumnus Michael Rey, oil and encaustic on chipboard on panel, 35 1/8 inches x 35 1/8 inches. Photo by Jeff McLane. *Muta* (right), 2015, by Michael Rey, oil on plasticine on panel, 77 inches x 71.7 inches. Photo by Office Baroque.

PROFILE / ALUMNI / ART / SPRING-2021
APRIL 13, 2021
BY SOLVEJ SCHOU
IMAGES COURTESY OF MICHAEL REY

GRAD ART ALUMNUS MICHAEL REY MAKES ABSTRACT SHAPES AND ART GROUNDED IN HUMANITY

It's early 2021. Artist and alumnus Michael Rey (MFA 08 Art) has been busy working on a new series of his signature large-scale abstract works—geometric shapes and block color, a combination of painting and sculpture—in a studio he built behind his house in Glendale.

"It's comforting to work alongside my family and two cats, and I get to paint outside," he says. "In the past year, my work has helped me turn inward and find peace with the suffering and confusion unfolding in the world around me. The COVID-19 pandemic has been like a hall of mirrors, but making art grounds me in what it means to be human."

Since childhood, Rey has turned to art—the mental and physical process of it—as a means of expression, and his work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in cities including Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, London and Istanbul. Raised in Sarasota, Florida, Rey grew up going to an arts camp, and he had his own art studio at his public arts high school. Then his teacher screened the 1972 documentary *Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940–1970* and a 1985 interview with Francis Bacon. "Both blew my mind, and I wanted to become an artist," Rey says.

After college, Rey moved west to attend ArtCenter for graduate school, inspired by L.A. artists he admired, among them the ArtCenter faculty member Mike Kelley. Summer terms with Grad Art Assistant Professors Kim Fisher and Jason Smith included trips to galleries, long and insightful critiques, and joyfully spending time in the studio, he says.

At ArtCenter, he started experimenting with painting on plasticine modeling clay. Later, as an alum, he focused on using monochromatic color to accentuate the abstract forms and textures of his pieces. "I

enjoy working with my hands and drawing the spontaneous shapes that form my work,” says Rey. “I used to spend hours each night drawing new shapes.” He would select two or three of these drawings to fabricate out of wood.

For works such as 2013’s spiky orange I.L.M.C., an anacronym for “I Love My Cat,” Rey kneaded plasticine onto a wood panel, then slowly smoothed the layers of clay by hand to refine the surface before applying oil paint. In 2014, Rey started using a computer-controlled machining tool to cut plywood to construct the wood panels, and he began to title his works with newly coined words. “I figured that if I was making up my own shapes, then I should make up my own words for the titles,” he says.

Newer work such as 2020’s bright red Dis Zutoume! and deep black Aunilak-Fuppov are his first pieces to feature just paint on wood, without plasticine. They were part of his 2020 solo exhibition Mtt. Vidrxs at the Philip Martin Gallery in L.A. The show opened just two weeks before the city went into lockdown due to the pandemic.

Rey’s works in progress are for a 2021 Philip Martin Gallery show—this time virtual. “Being an artist was tough in 2020,” says Rey. “I’m grateful to still be able to make my work.”