

ON THE COVER

Channel by Mark Craig

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on September 4, 2020.

The initial appeal of art for Mark Craig, a Canadian contemporary artist, was academic: art history. He painted in his spare time but studied the history of art and artists as he pursued his degree. Following graduation, he was an advertising art director, always knowing that what he really wanted to be doing was painting. He felt that it would be a luxury to fully engage in doing something that he loved, recognizing that not everyone gets the chance to strike out on their own. Five years ago, he made that move, “pushed off from the dock,” and has not looked back.

Through his studies, Craig admired artists such as George Braque, French painter and sculptor; Pablo Picasso, Spanish painter, sculptor; and Kurt Schwitters, German painter—all of whom brought collage to their painting. Craig gravitated toward their work when he began painting full-time.

Collage-like techniques have existed since the Chinese invented paper. But modern artists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries adapted and brought collage into their work. From a technique perspective, when artists like Braque and Picasso incorporated pieces of paper into their oil paintings, they added texture, and often the collage material contained references to current events or items from popular culture. Viewers could witness the process; they could see the brush strokes that artists combined with collage material in the finished work. The insertion of collage “brought meaning to the ordinary.”

Using collage in creating abstract images was a departure from the neo-expressionist painting that Craig had been doing. He began to realize that he needed to get out of a rut. Neo-expressionists paint recognizable objects—such as human bodies—in an emotional way to express the artist’s inner feelings. They are known to be bold with their materials and often use the vivid colors of the Fauves. Craig turned to abstract images while keeping the brightness of color that he had been using.

Craig starts his creative thinking with different colored shapes that he moves around, searching for a combination he likes. It is often not what he would have first thought to do but rather, Craig conveys,

[It is a way to] explore and refine composition, color, pattern and texture, and to juxtapose design elements that might not necessarily occur to me. Once I start painting, I feel free to use

the collage as a starting point and allow the paint and the textured canvas surface to dictate the direction that the final piece takes. My work is purely abstract but usually makes reference, if only in an oblique way, to specific places or ideas that inspire me. (Elaine Fleck Gallery, artist’s statement)

Craig commented that collage works well to open his mind for his abstract painting. He tends, however, not to use collage for his landscapes and portraits. At the moment, he displays only his abstracts, whereas he considers his other work is still premature. He is waiting to find out what direction it will take. Will he meld abstraction with landscapes and portraits whether collaged or not? He states that all painting boils down to color, texture, patterns, shapes—and good design applies to everything.

Channel, the painting on the cover of this issue of the *American Psychologist*, began as a collage. The lower left and lower right of the painting include collage material such as crushed gravel and sand. There are also bits of the internal pieces of exploded firecrackers. This painting contains both oil and acrylic paint: Dry-brush oil highlighted the sand and other material; some of the shapes are placed over an acrylic underpainting. The dry-brush oil technique picks up and highlights the gritty hard edges and textures in the painting. Craig finishes many of his pieces with dry-brushed oil paints both to emphasize the surface texture and to enrich the colors.

Craig wanted the blue shape in the center of *Channel* to be flowing and provide a sense of fluidity—a cascade of water. The channel of water adds energy and an organic feeling. The green shape and its shadow also have an organic quality. The black shape brings the eyes of the viewer to that side of the painting. The drips of paint add a sense of movement and hint at an overall impression of a watercolor. Craig said that it takes a lot of work to get those drips to look just right. And, of course, if he had not wanted them there, he could have painted them out. The drips are intentional.

Craig is still an art historian at heart. Although he has never worked derivatively, that is, copying the work of his favorite artists, he knows that they are there with him as he paints.

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