

# Stephen Kinsella

## Creating Art for Aesthetic Value

By Tina Guiomar

**W**orks of abstract expressionism separate themselves from all classic distinctions. Art history has gone from prehistoric cave and Egyptian drawings that communicated stories, to Italian Renaissance art that glorified religion, to contemporary works. But abstract expressionism is more about the process than the outcome. The expression lies in the creating of the art – not the resulting art itself. Abstract? Hence the name.

*The Boulevard* met with abstract expressionist Stephen Kinsella, a New York artist we had the fortune to meet at an ACRIA (AIDS Community Research Initiative of America) art auction event in the Hamptons. Stephen's work has evolved from the classics, studying works of Turner, Monet, Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso. Like any artist, he educated himself to help compose, develop and evolve his own work.

At an early age, with the support of his family, Stephen started taking art classes at Munson William Proctor Institute in Utica, New York. He attended the Parsons School of Design and graduated with a BFA in art direction and graphic design. Once out of school, he landed a job at BBDO advertising. This financially supported his continuing development in painting while educating himself with art classes at night. En route to working on his passion for painting, he dabbled in the film industry, where he met with great success. In 2000, he co-wrote, produced and directed an independent feature called *Double Parked*, which won the Filmmaker Breakthrough Award at the Slamdance Film Festival. Even with success, he left the industry.

Why did he leave? "The industry was too much business and not enough focus on the art," he says. He decided to concentrate on his passion - painting. The process of his work is much like many abstract expres-



*Dutch Farmland, 2006, oil on canvas*

sionists; it's about the process and what it means to the artist and not as much about the outcome. Through his meditative process he creates beautiful, colorful abstract pieces that many believe evoke "peaceful, rhythmical, mystical feelings." He creates work that has an "elusive soothing enigmatic quality."

He begins the routine with a blank canvas, an inspiration, and an idea of what mood to evoke. "Every time I start a canvas it's frightening but exciting. I always say to myself 'Can I do it again?'" he admits. And he does. Stephens's technique is the same for each piece: he begins by attacking the canvas with large gestural brushstrokes and finishes with smaller strokes, editing and revising the piece over and over with a "controlled systematic approach to the work," he says.

Each series relates in mood, emotion and tone. He uses a push-and-pull technique using light and dark tones, bold colors, and layering for textures. This creates a complex arrangement of colors, similar to Rothko's color field paintings, where the viewer's eye goes in and out of the composition.

He finds inspiration everywhere in his environment: in his garden, the ocean, the Hampton farmlands, or even trash in the city streets. He also gains insight and inspiration from the classics. Artists such as Jasper Johns, Rothko, Cezanne, Picasso, Van Gogh, Matisse, de Kooning, and Pollack have great influence in his paintings.

Stephen has gone through many stages in the development of his work. In *Bougainville in Barts* (2003), he uses lush green and coral colors to create an abstract floral garden much like Monet did in *Water Lilies*. He also went through a phase of aerial views of farmland that are more constructive than his other work. A friend at the time had a prop plane and they took a trip around the Hampton farmland. He was inspired by the amazing patterns and took that mental picture and translated it to paintings. The aerial farmland series echoes the structure of cubism. Stephen is currently working on a series titled *Earth Sea and Sky*, using a green palette of waves and circles, with an "ecological feeling".

Kinsella's work is very different from his contemporaries. His work is not about angst or politics, but creating something beautiful. I jokingly compared his work vs. other artists as Tai Chi vs. kickboxing. It's nice to see work that's about being beautiful and peaceful and not about the shock value or making a statement to the world. But that's where freedom of art comes in: to each his own.

Kinsella's work mainly develops from inspirations around his local environment. I asked if he had given any consideration to traveling in order to gain insight and ideas. His answer was no, as he gets inspiration from his great homes on Long Island and New York City. Why travel to the Napa Valley for the sights of vineyards when he can see some right here in his backyard? He is



*City Nights, 2005, oil on canvas*

comfortable in his environment and has "plenty to work with here." If he were to travel any time soon, he said, he had an interest in places like India and the Far East. He would love to see the terrain, the forests, and the bamboo forests.

As a developing artist, I asked Kinsella for any advice for an artist trying to make a start. His words of wisdom: "Believe in yourself, do what you want to do, push yourself, don't take no for an answer, and don't be afraid of someone...The famous artists of today started out just like anyone else, don't be intimidated by them, they're just human beings." The steps to any success is getting yourself shown, meeting fellow artists, taking classes and donating work for exposure, which is how *The Boulevard* met Stephen Kinsella. Not just an avid artist, but also an activist, he donates his work to Food Bank of NY, Harlem Art Project, and ACRIA. It's a way to "kill two birds with one stone - raising money for charity and getting your work out there to be seen," he says.

I found my time with Stephen an exciting experience. It's amazing to hear the processes, the experiences, the opinions and ideas that leave an impression as to the persona of this individual artist. I look forward to seeing many of his works to come. The art certainly reflects the artist. Stephen Kinsella is beautiful, bold, focused and peaceful, as is his work.

*Earth Sea and Sky* is currently showing at the Golden Eagle Gallery, East Hampton; *Circles and Waves* at the Clinton West Gallery, New York City; and *The Spring Show* at Ashawagh Hall, East Hampton.

Stephen is currently preparing for his next solo exhibit in New York City this November. Visit [www.stephenkinsella.com](http://www.stephenkinsella.com) for exact dates and gallery location.



*Bougainville in Barts, 2003, oil on canvas*