

Artist Interviews

Carmen Gonzalez

Carmen Gonzalez was born and raised in Edmonton and has lived in the city her entire life. Her mother was an artist and as a child Gonzalez would watch her draw and paint. As a teenager she began to draw as well and really enjoyed it. Upon attending University she entered the Faculty of Fine Arts but withdrew from her studies and, for twenty years, stopped doing art.

In 2006 Gonzalez was involved in a serious car accident and underwent a lengthy period of rehabilitation. While in recovery at a facility in Canmore she was asked to make a list of five things she always wanted to accomplish. At the top of her list was her desire to return to art making and, when she returned to Edmonton, she enrolled in art classes with local instructors Willie Wong and Jerry Heine. She then enrolled in Fine Arts at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, and graduated with a diploma in Fine Arts in 2013. Since then she has participated in a number of local exhibitions and Edmonton art festivals such as Edmonton's immensely popular Whyte Avenue Art Walk.

At the beginning of her art studies Gonzalez focused on watercolour floral paintings. When she started her course at the Faculty of Extension, however, she began to zero in on her present subject matter. As expressed by the artist:

I have always liked objects. I love the form of objects but also their associations and the memories associated with them. This is how the 'candy theme' of many of my works came about. Watching my children eat candies led to memories and this became the subject of my grad show - the joy of being a child with no cares in the world except my bag of candy.

Over time Gonzalez has developed a number of themes focusing on still-life subjects. Among these are the series *Bottled Up*; *Fun Food*; *Vintage Items*; and *Play Time*. In all of these series the artist is drawing on memories, childhood experiences, and her impressions of an earlier time. In discussing the series on vintage items, for example, Gonzalez stated that old objects seem to have so much more character when compared to contemporary objects and there seemed to be an artistry and care taken in the making of these objects that is often lacking at present.

Gonzalez's art style is quite hybrid in nature. For the artist it is difficult to categorize her style as it is not totally realism; not totally pop art; a little illustrative and not totally contemporary. She also states that her painting style is influenced by hyper-realism where, unlike in photorealist work, there is an emotional content being expressed. As articulated by Gonzalez:

I am not trying for photorealism and lean more towards illustration. For me there is not enough character in photorealist work. I like to add my own flair to a work. I also want to make the work playful: I want to make people smile and go right into their childhood. Today there's so many things that drag people down and I want to make them happy.

A further intent of Gonzalez's work as an artist is to encourage the viewer to stop and notice things; to notice the details and the beauty of everything around them. In their boldness her paintings demand attention and through the use of meticulous detail and rich, often exaggerated

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colour, she aims to trigger all the senses. In her more recent works Gonzalez has been adding patterns to the background of her paintings, hearkening back to the patterned wall-papers of her childhood and to add 'zest' and command concentration on the work. As revealed by the artist:

I'm always trying to lure people in; my paintings are always screaming 'hey, look at me, look at me'.



Carmen Gonzalez
Heavenly Split, 2019
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist