



The Knife's Edge

Actor, artist and adrenaline junkie Michael McGrady finds balance in the drama of paint.

BY GINA TEICHERT





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Michael McGrady is known for playing intense roles—sometimes on both sides of the law—in series like *Ray Donovan* and *Southland*. Perhaps you wouldn't imagine a tough TV cop painting landscapes on his day off, but the multitasking artist isn't easily pinned down.

"I'm a hang glider pilot. I love to ride my Harley. As an actor, you're called up and when they say action, you've gotta bring it. There's no safety net," says McGrady, drawing an analogy between the directness of his paintings and his other adrenaline sports. When you're sharing a scene with a major star, they're "bringing their A game" and you better too, he says. "There are hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake

every minute on set. And I love living on that edge. That's me. That is what I'm all about," McGrady adds.

While he has explored many art forms over the years, McGrady's mature paintings are as much about immediacy and action as they are about the image itself. "I try to do one swipe and if it serves the purpose, I move on. I don't noodle. You can't noodle with a knife," he says.

The approach suits him. "Any time I've tried to use my intellect to paint, I find myself getting caught up in details and then I get frustrated," McGrady continues, noting his appreciation for the deftly rendered work of artists Jeremy Lipking and Mark Maggiori. "I just finally realized, you know, just go with who you are.

1
Withstanding the Surge,
oil on gallery wrap
canvas, 36 x 48"

2
Enchanting, oil on
gallery wrap canvas,
24 x 24"



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You're not a guy who's going to get all detailed. You don't do jigsaw puzzles," he laughs.

McGrady's marbled, often linear paint application hints at Gerhard Richter's squeegee paintings while his subjects call to mind desert drives and afternoons at the coast. "I haven't been able to come up with just the right labels for his work," says Trailside Galleries managing partner Maryvonne Leshe, who represents McGrady. "It's really a traditional scene that he paints, but it's not traditional in how he brings it to life.

There's almost an abstract quality to it. It's a strong design, but a very simplified form."

It was one of McGrady's seascapes that first attracted her to the Southern California painter's work. "I just felt there was such a rhythm, a pattern in it," Leshe says. "It was almost musical. It spoke of spontaneity."

McGrady says, "I want to get even more abstract and more drawn to color and shapes, atmosphere. I want people to feel what it feels like to be in that environ-

3
Ocean Breeze, oil on
gallery wrap canvas,
36 x 36"



4
Shimmer, oil on gallery
 wrap canvas, 20 x 20"

5
Desert Glow, oil on
 canvas, 24 x 24"



ment, not just see it."

McGrady had always been a fan of J.M.W. Turner, but a recent trip to The Met introduced him to the artist's watercolors and more "amorphous" work. "Less is more," says McGrady. "There's just so much participation on the viewer's part because not everything is spelled out. It's not narrative. When I first started knife painting, I realized you could suggest a landscape; you can suggest a grove of trees and a pond. You can make the suggestion of these things without getting too detailed," says McGrady, who first discovered palette-knife painting through a PBS show. "There was a sculptural quality, too, because at the time I was also sculpting in marble and travertine and wax and I thought, this is the best of both worlds. I get to kind of sculpt the paint."

A former interior muralist and faux painter to the stars, McGrady's practice has covered everything from ceiling frescoes to Greco-Roman columns. "I started doing mural work years ago when that movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*" came out," he says. "All the women in our area were buying up these Mediterranean-style homes and they all wanted it to look like a Tuscan villa."

Architectural work was a lucrative side gig McGrady could do between acting projects. Clients included Erin Brockovich and *Little House on the Prairie* star Melissa Gilbert, mostly through word of mouth and his then-wife's interior design business. Later, transitioning to a studio practice gave McGrady the ability to work from home and play "Mister Mom" to his three young children while also having an independently creative outlet—a complement to the collaborative field of film.

Recently, McGrady has been inspired by the beaches and lighthouses of Cape Cod where he's shooting *The Perfect Couple*, a Netflix mini-series starring Nicole Kidman and Liev Schreiber. Wherever he is, McGrady is "on the hunt," not always painting exactly what's out there, instead finding ways to share the experience of a place in an alternative way.

"From seeing some of Michael's early work, you know there has been a road that he's been traveling," says Leshe. "And I think that's exciting to see." ●