

“Artist Michael Williams interview: ‘I spend 30 per cent looking, 50 per cent procrastinating and 20 per cent working’,”  
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## Artist Michael Williams interview: ‘I spend 30 per cent looking, 50 per cent procrastinating and 20 per cent working’

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Artist Michael Williams in his studio in Long Island City, Queens, NY. (NEVILLE

From the outside, the building, a former perfume storage depot, looks deserted – industrial and sad. Williams does not respond to my ringing the bell, necessitating phone calls before the rumpled-haired, affable guy eventually lets me in. We sit by his desk near his computer, a major source of his content. Williams says, “The appropriated image is my subject matter, and it’s often deliberately distasteful. I find this in explorations of material on the computer.”

He says that to keep himself from getting too comfortable he never has had a studio for more than a year, preferring to get new spaces, to force him to change. “I am courting chaos by uprooting myself and in doing so charging the process.”

Williams was born in 1978 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, a small American town where his mother encouraged him to be a painter. The family moved to Providence, Rhode Island, when he was in his teens. He then studied scul-

pture at Washington University in Missouri, where he was “seduced by conceptual art”.

We have been sitting in the front of his studio with finished works ranged across from us and he then takes me to the adjacent room where the “making” is done. I find it hard to call them “paintings”, as Williams does not work with traditional tools. There is not a paintbrush in sight – airbrushes and used cardboard stencils lie on the floor.

Williams says his goal in making a successful work is “to make a painting to lie off-kilter and that is uncomfortable in its own skin”. His current palette of artificially lurid lollipop colours seems at odds with his challenging words, but the works do have an unsettling quality about them. Many defy the traditional formal rules of painting: denying a central composition, the eye is allowed to wander over the surface freely, a surface that again breaks rules of traditional practice with a deliberate lack of texture.

There is a goofiness about them in their seemingly casual choice of subject matter and doodle-like additions, often reinforced by their titles. The works themselves are, however, technically skilful and undeniably serious. “Using my paints thinned out produces millions of colours”. This means that there is a homogenising element in the technique ensuring that the colours don’t clash – even if they intuitively should.

Williams chooses his titles after he has completed each piece, saying that there is an “intuitive relationship” in selecting the title based on the arch of how they are made. He confesses he comes to the studio every day. I ask what his studio practice is. “I spend 30 per cent looking, 50 per cent procrastinating and 20 per cent working.”



Artist Michael Williams in his studio in Long Island City, Queens, NY. (NEVILLE ELDER)