

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

Watch this episode of Friday Arts featuring Charles Burwell as a segment on Friday, February 6 at 8:30 p.m. on WHY-Y-TV

The Abstract Art of Charles Burwell

Art — Produced by Michael O'Reilly

We pull up into a hidden lot behind the Liberty Market on Front St. As the Market Frankford Subway passes overhead, you can see — through the windows of the train — a tree, growing out of the roof of the abandoned bank on the other side of Front Street. Somewhere in this sprawling complex of interconnected studios, is Charles Burwell, hard at work on another painting.

Burwell has work included in major museums throughout the US and he shows at Bridgette Mayer Gallery. Ms Mayer, the owner of the gallery, says she has never met another artist who works like he does. Susan Isaacs, a professor of art and curator, describes “the immense amount of joy” she gets upon seeing his work. Joy because the abstract art he makes is larger than life — big, colorful canvases with all manner of textures and shapes — and he does it through a unique process.

Over more than 30 years, Burwell has amassed a library of shapes from which he can pull to make his art. And it is not an exaggeration to say that this library spans thousands of files gathered during the last 30 years. At first these shapes were cut out of cardboard or wood, but within the last 10 years, he has started digitizing these shapes into the computer, where he can more easily organize them. Sketching new ideas, compositing any number of layers is faster and easier as well.

Because it is this layering that is at the heart of Charles Burwell's work. While he may “sketch” or “composite” shapes and colors and textures in the computer, he then will actually make a piece of art from that, meticulously painting each layer by hand. Some pieces of art he has produced recently can take him over a year to finish. That is what you are struck by: you don't need to know anything about art to understand the hard work that went into these paintings, which only adds to the depth of what these images are trying to say.

- See more at: <http://why.org/cms/fridayarts/#sthash.mwSCWZIV.dpuf>