

# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



[ visual art ]

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## LOOK WHO'S TALKING

Expressionist Mark Brosseau opens up about art that's hard to explain. **By Bruce Walsh**

**B**ridgette Mayer's high heels click-clack across the hardwood floors of her gallery, the sharp sound careening through the first floor of the converted townhouse.

"We're in a deep life conversation here," says painter Mark Brosseau, sounding a note of playfulness, as she strides past our interview.

"That's what I like to hear!" she replies. And they, for a moment, share a knowing laugh — artist and art dealer on the same page at last.

At 34, Brosseau is still adjusting to a somewhat unfair expectation often hurled at abstract artists: that he be willing and able to discuss his emotional connection to the work.

Nobody knows that better than Mayer. "He was a little feisty at first," she says. "But over the years he's become more open with some of the underlining ideas, and with the narratives — his process. Some collectors need more of an introduction to the work, the story, or it's hard for them to get into the painting."

In a genre traditionally filled with stridently brooding painters, Brosseau has always felt a bit outside the outsider's clique. Over the years, his work has been attacked for favoring the analytical over the visceral, and he admits he developed a defensive, combative stance when asked to discuss his art.

But Brosseau didn't come to abstract expressionism the way most of his contemporaries did. A working-class kid from Vermont, he was valedictorian of his high school and won a scholarship to Dartmouth. His talent — or at least what he excelled in — was math and chemistry, and by college he was pursuing engineering and architecture without much conviction.

"I knew I had to build a drawing portfolio if I wanted to go into architecture. So I took a drawing class, and it was just. ..." He trails off, searching for a way to express this defining moment. "It was like you're discovering how you see."

Brosseau's abstractions almost always present windows within windows, and even paintings within paintings, sometimes revealing shockingly bright hues at the source. One senses the artist is leading the viewer to new plains of vision — distant fields of play — within the canvas.

"From far away and in reproductions, his work looks almost 'neat' and graphic-y — sort of straight-edged and geometric," says local painter Rebecca Jacoby via e-mail. "But then looking more closely you can see the brush work and the messiness of the process. I love that he allows us to see his hand working."

While Brosseau has always been able to intuit this meticulous, ordered journey, he's only recently been able to articulate it.

"There was always this 'about' question. 'What's it about? What's



it about?" ... I felt violated. But I think, had I been doing what I was doing with conviction, it wouldn't have come up. I hadn't figured it out for myself," he says, looking a bit like a man forced to discuss a bad breakup. But then came a Fulbright scholarship and a year living in Iceland. "It was this whole concept of expressing emotion in the paintings, and halfway through the Fulbright year I just decided that if I didn't want to do that, there was just no reason to. This can be a completely analytical and explorative endeavor. I can just do things because I want to see what happens."

Later, Brosseau stands inches from *Urban* (pictured) — one of more than 20 pieces in his new show, "Wondrous Spaces." He runs his finger over the surface, lovingly following the angle of a color plane. "I'm interested in creating these spaces here, discovering them. It's a process of feeling my way through it, but it's not like, 'Oh, I'm feeling sad today, so I'm going to do this kind of thing because I hate life.'"

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✦ "Wondrous Spaces" runs through July 31, Bridgette Mayer Gallery, 709 Walnut St., 215-413-8893, [bridgettemayergallery.com](http://bridgettemayergallery.com).

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