

Tony Starbuck: Intersections

By Terri Haythorn



Many conflicting concepts- like motion versus stillness, urban versus rural, fauve versus neutral-halt viewers to take a closer glance at the work of Tony Starbuck, whose show *Intersections* is featured at TheBrownstoneArt in Brooklyn, NY from May 22nd, 2022 until June 12, 2022. Often suspended in dreamy, kinetic backgrounds, explosions of color dominate the central planes of Starbuck's compositions, introducing stillness while boasting properties associated with street art, including use of imposing forms and impressions of quickly executed territorial marking. In the past, Starbuck created a sense of depth in utilizing blurred photographic pastoral backgrounds juxtaposed with centralized graffiti-like marks. These figures suggested untamed, meteorologic or maybe even spiritual concepts. In his recent body of work on view at TheBrownstoneArt, elements of street art are still front and center, but Starbuck reverses course in allowing a spray of bright flowers to mimic the domineering spraypainted tag while the background reflects the motion of the energetic cityscape subdued in blur. Starbuck's use of color and grey-tones further emphasizes the contradiction yet coexistence of nature versus civilization. In the pieces Flower 1, Flower 3, and Flower 5, nature seems to rise above the confines of city life like a flower emerging from a sidewalk crack. The scale, clarity, and saturation of flora levitates and seems to dominate the subdued, smudged-out metropolis.

Starbuck's exploration of street art continues in both *Goat* and his *Sprayboy* pieces. Figures become the focal point, and in *Sprayboy* and *Sprayboy 2*, we see something that might suggest either a self-portrait or a portrait of a clandestine artist in action. Graffiti has long been recognized as a naughty, rebellious, and yet an ultimately hip artform, nuanced with sophisticated hallmark styles ranging from calligraphic expression and imagery to use of stencils, stickers, paste-ups, and so forth. Starbuck celebrates the role of the graffiti artist in society by giving him narrative distinction. Layers of photographed urbanity, tags, and pastel celebratory shades sprayed or sloshed-on with trailing organic drips of pigment diverts viewers from the vandalistic nature congruent with concepts of graffiti and encourages viewers to sift through the layers in a more pleasurable way. Maybe it is the appealing use of color, the lack of grit, the careful application and consideration to photographic and painted layers, or maybe it's the flexible nature of impermanent, relocatable art that renders Starbuck's pieces more palatable and easygoing than traditional concepts of guerilla art.

The largest focus of *Intersections*, however, is the *Perforations* series in which focus itself is challenged. Perforations become holes in which you peer through, creating the illusion that something tangible like a landscape or object is within sight. Yet something tests your vision in Starbuck's pieces, both literally in the true optic sense as well as conceptually. Background versus foreground creates a shifting perspective in which we believe something is obscured through the abstraction. Either prismatic orbs shift to create a shallow sense of bokeh, or an opaque plane has indeed been perforated, and we are given a sense of a scene visible yet incomplete beyond our reach of comprehension. There is almost an annoyance as the desire to see more has been obstructed. We try to possibly make sense of the abstraction- or to even stabilize our vision amongst these alternating planes, compelling our focus to try harder. In the struggle, it's the abstraction that gains clarity and integrity unto itself, and this is the pivotal essence that becomes clear in Starbuck's work. The conceptual overrides the optical prismatic

interplay between transparency and opacity, and we resolve and are delighted to be gratified in accepting the colorful abstraction for the experience it yields.

These intersecting explorations are some of the experiences felt and discovered when reviewing the works of Tony Starbuck's Intersections at TheBrownstoneArt in Brooklyn.

BIO

Starbuck was born in Rome, Italy on February 12th to an artist mom and poet dad. He lived there until he was 6 months old and regrets that he never learned Italian. But, then again, neither did Abraham Lincoln. He grew up in San Francisco with two brothers and it was a great place to be a kid when no one had coders for parents. He spent an odd year at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1982 making experimental films and seeing every sunrise while delivering produce in a box truck. Since then, he has recorded a lot of sound while making furniture, lights, paintings, drawings, and photographs. He has lived in Brooklyn, New York for decades while raising two daughters and continuing to record sound, dress sets, and make his artwork.

Exhibition Details:

"Tony Starbuck: Intersections"

May 22nd to June 12th

TheBrownstoneArt
129 Park Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217

In-Person Opening: May 22nd, 2 -6 pm

In-Person Closing: June 12th, 2 – 6 pm

*All other viewings by appointment

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