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Discover how painter Ian Rayer Smith balances tradition and innovation in his work, creating new forms and visual paths with a classical feel that engage viewers on an emotional level.

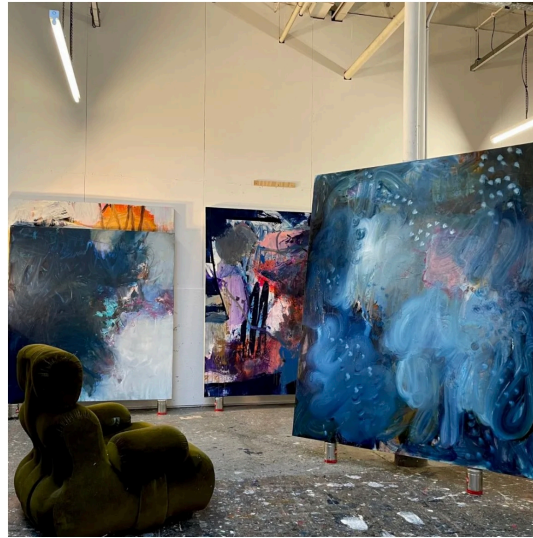
Ian Rayer Smith: Multiplicity of Answers

Ian Rayer-Smith is an accomplished painter whose work draws from various sources, including the old masters and contemporary culture.

In his paintings, he seeks to connect with man's earliest forms of self-expression and create a strong sense of emotional impact or energy.

Rayer-Smith strives to bring cohesion to his visual language, which is harmonious yet disruptive, and he believes that contemporary art should pose questions rather than provide answers. His work explores new forms and optical paths while infusing a classical feel, balancing the tension between tradition and innovation.

Rayer-Smith prioritizes exploration and discovery in his art over branding and market demands. In this interview with Execute Magazine, he discusses his artistic process, approach to bridging the gap between past and present, and the role of questioning in contemporary art.



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In your statement, you describe the painting as a means of connecting to man's earliest forms of self-expression. How do you believe this connection shapes how viewers engage with your work, and how do you approach the challenge of bridging this gap between past and present?

I suppose "visceral" is an over-used word these days, but it does in fact describe my work reasonably accurately. I aim to create paintings that have either a strong sense of emotional impact or, if not that then a force of energy. For me painting isn't so much about what is represented but how it is painted. As far as we know, art-making pre-dates any formal spoken languages and has been with us for many millennia.



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Your work draws from various influences, from the Renaissance to contemporary culture. Can you speak more about how you balance these disparate sources to create a cohesive and meaningful visual language and what role you see this language playing in the larger cultural landscape?

Painting is about emotion, which transcends language. It expresses things that are beyond words, and so there is a joy in mining something that is this basic, endless and fundamental. As humans, we've always had the capacity – and the need – to express ourselves visually. I don't think very much has changed in since we were living in caves.

You have so accurately described this balance and the need for cohesion. Painters have always borrowed from the past and have produced art for the era in which they live. It brings a much needed reinvention. But that reinvention has to be for a purpose. I always hope my art brings that cohesion in the visual language which is harmonious but which is also, importantly, disruptive. It could be argued that in the past, for obvious commercial reasons most mainstream art aimed more for conformity. Because of this, it was often restricted in its scope by the paymaster.

Nowadays, I'd like to think the situation is the other way round. We now look to artists for the stimulation of new ideas. I do not want to paint something that already exists. I need to move forward. But that does not mean that the traditional fundamentals of structure, light and perspective can be ignored.

Those are basic rules that we all need to adhere to, to a greater or lesser extent. I leave it to others to decide how successful my art is in observing those rules, but it has to be said that the larger cultural landscape can only be enhanced by breaking them occasionally, which I also aim to do. What ultimately matters is the viewer's emotional response to a piece of art.

You describe your paintings as posing questions rather than providing answers. How do you see the act of questioning fitting into the broader context of contemporary art, and how do you believe it can be used to challenge and engage viewers?

Questioning is a vital part of the disruption that I was just talking about. The whole point of a question is that it can lead to a multiplicity of answers. Each viewer will hopefully find their own answer. Art should not be didactic. I think the most successful contemporary art lends itself to a multiplicity of responses. If a viewer doesn't feel challenged in some way by what they are looking at, the work will fail to ignite any passion or provide genuine enrichment.



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Your work explores new forms and visual paths and aims to instill a classical feel. How do you navigate this tension between tradition and innovation, and what are each approach's potential benefits and limitations?

Yes, there is definitely a tension between tradition and innovation, but whilst classical, traditional methods provide an anchor for my work, it is important to know these rules in order to be able to occasionally (or maybe frequently) throw them away. It gives you something to push back against.

For me, that is an energising process. Sticking to one without the other is rarely satisfying. Neither tradition nor innovation can truly thrive without the other acting as an opposite. But "innovation", just for the sake of it and without having a true understanding of the traditional forms and rules, can create a vacuum of ideas.

Your work is searching for something you may never find. How do you balance the desire for discovery and exploration with the demands of the art market and the need to create a recognizable brand as an artist?

I actually think that the art market thrives on the very act of exploration that you have just mentioned. It needs that exploration for its own survival, in order to grow and not stagnate. That is why I do not dwell on the idea of market demands.

What the market may demand today may be very different to what it demanded ten years ago, and that is for the best. I do not think of my art in terms of branding. That would stifle creativity and lead to being formulaic, which is the enemy of innovation. Evolution is fundamentally necessary if we are to thrive, and I need my work to go in whichever direction it takes me.



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Can you describe your process for accessing and conveying emotion in your work, and how do you balance this with technical considerations such as color and composition?

Can you speak more about how you approach experimentation in your studio practice and what role you believe risk-taking and failure play in the creative process?

Risk-taking and failure are the twin pillars of an artist's life. They are certainly essential components of my development as an artist. What is the point in playing it safe? If it doesn't work, I can always paint over it.

You are based in Manchester, UK, a city with a rich artistic and cultural production history. How do you see your role as an artist in this context, and how has the city's creative landscape influenced your practice and the themes you explore?

I'm not sure that artistic communities or "schools" still exist in the same way that they used to. Having said that, what better place to feel the buzz in the air, with all that this city has to offer. But I do confess that I often shut myself away from the frenzy of it all. I do not need a particular view in order to paint. Manchester's notoriously grey skies give me an even light and plenty of scope for adding a burst of colour into my work. I suppose you could say that in that way my work is a direct response to my environment! I also mostly paint to instrumental music. Manchester's inspirational club scene has provided quite a lot of that.

In today's digital age, social media has become a powerful platform for artists to showcase their work and connect with audiences. What role do you believe social media plays in the artist's journey, and how do you see it impacting the creation and reception of art? Do you see this impact as more positive or negative, and why?

It's mostly positive. Platforms such as Instagram are so useful for getting an artist's work out to be seen by a wider public. Social media opens up ideas and accessibility for the viewer, and sometimes for artists themselves to take inspiration. Negatives can include the lessening of true "curation of art in the traditional sense, as I'm a believer in the good work that galleries do.

As an established artist with years of experience, what advice would you offer to emerging artists looking to establish themselves in the art world? And looking ahead, how do you see yourself evolving as an artist over the next five years, and what new themes or techniques are you excited to explore in your work?

To an emerging artist I would say keep going! Do art fairs. Use social media. As for my own career, it's now about the development of the secondary market for my work. Artistically, the idea of working to an even larger scale excites me. I have no way of predicting what new themes or techniques may emerge in the future, except that the resurgence of the use of oil paint in some of my recent work has become an absolute joy.

Ian Rayer Smith website:
<https://www.ianrayersmith.com/>