

Inner Mountain

Michael Roque Collins' paintings invite spiritual exploration



Michael Roque Collins' *Inland Crossing* is a visual metaphor for the bridge art creates between physical and spiritual experience.

By [Liz Brindley Liz](#)

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In his 1912 book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Russian painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky wrote, "The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards."

When I tell Houston, Texas' Michael Roque Collins that his work reminds me of Kandinsky's book, he exclaims, "You're speaking my language!"

Collins views paintings as "vessels of the soul," describing himself as a "painter of spiritual landscapes." He uses dreams, mythology and memory to create pieces that

explore the transitions between despair and hope, order and disorder, as well as physical and spiritual experience.

Inland Mountain Journey is Collins' upcoming exhibition at LewAllen Gallery, and features his most recent body of paintings- colorful, ethereal views of archaeological ruins overwhelmed by the rampant growth of nature. These views are not entirely rooted in realism, but are instead dreamlike, as if the paint on the canvas is a veiled threshold between our everyday reality and the infinite potential of spiritual exploration. The natural overtaking of the human world beckons viewers into Collins' worlds to discover not only the artwork, but also insights into, as he describes in his artist statement, "inner and psychological life."

Collins was born in Texas in 1955, earned his BFA from the University of Houston in 1978 and went on to receive an MFA in painting from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He has exhibited in numerous group and solo shows, and his works reside in a variety of collections in Texas including the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the El Paso Museum of Art and the San Antonio Museum of Art.

Though his paintings have often been influenced by coastal environments due to his home base on the Gulf of Mexico, he explains that mountains have always loomed in his vision. This vision comes to life in *Inland Mountain Journey*, where Collins charts new territory to explore peaks and forests; like what Kandinsky explains as "the need to move ever upwards and forwards, by sweat of the brow, through sufferings and fears."

"By using nature in his paintings, [Collins] metaphorically suggests that the human spirit has the same capacity for the cycles of despair that can, through endurance and a sense of struggle, ultimately emerge into a hopeful ascendance," Ken Marvel, CEO of LewAllen, shares.

Laced throughout these natural scenes are ruins inspired by Collins' travels to Italy and South America, markings that beg questions of loss, impermanence, and decay. "Ruin

is both the idea of artifact of peoples' dreams, aspirations, good deeds, bad deeds that have preceded our time," Marvel says, "but also ruin that sort of ironically endures. The ruin that continues to suggest the possibility of a more hopeful future."

Collins creates this sense of hope through strokes of color pressed up against each other in tense contrasts of light and dark, renewal and loss. "There's a magical quality when you look at land and see light and darkness," he says. His paintings convey the necessity of this balance to fully experience both the highs and lows of human experience. "Melancholy somber," he says, "has to be present for the joy to show through."

Typically, Collins adds to the overall atmosphere of his work through topographical textures of paint created with tongue depressors, yardsticks and palette knives. But when he approached this series, he says, he felt a longing to return to his first love: the paintbrush. "The brush is a tool to fire paint onto the canvas and spread the hues around," he tells SFR. Collins combines the movement of the brush with the movement of his own body. "Something greater than conscious mind can arise if you allow your body to move while you create," he adds.

In some sense, Collins' overall creative process can be viewed as a spiritual journey. He begins with a blank canvas, or what he calls a "flat white void." What follows is a series of intentional and sensitive decisions to create landscapes from the first brush stroke to the last. Just as Collins' landscapes unfold with each brushstroke, the paintings in *Inland Mountain Journey* can be seen as invitations, or mirrors, for spiritual treks of our own inner mountains, explorations that unfold with each step.

Michael Roque Collins: Inland Mountain Journey Artist Reception

5 pm Friday Oct. 27. Free.

LewAllen Galleries,

1613 Paseo de Peralta,

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