



Kirsten Akens

Portrait of an Artist

El Mac speaks softly and carries big spray-paint.

by Kirsten Akens

Even in the realm of public art, much of Miles “El Mac” MacGregor’s work is big. Really big. Take, for instance, “Las Flores del Campo,” a piece that he painted over the course of about a week in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, last year. It’s a black and gray image of a woman whose clothing appears to morph from the wall itself.

And it stands 11 stories high.

“There’s no denying that when it comes to art, size does matter,” El Mac says in a phone

interview from his home in Los Angeles. “When you see a large sculpture or a large painting—I mean, the same exact piece if it were a few inches high just wouldn’t have the same impact as when it’s a couple stories high.”

Of course, he adds, the medium of his work lends itself to painting bigger. He uses specific spray-paint nozzles called “fatcaps” to create a unique hollow circle shape and pattern. “It’s my little signature,” El Mac explains. “The

bigger I can paint, the more details I can put in. It’s really difficult to actually paint smaller in that medium.”

For his current show, *Aerosol Exalted*, at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, El Mac’s images obviously aren’t as big as his outdoor public works, but some are still pretty hefty. Three of the canvases (collaborations with Retna, another contemporary L.A. artist) each run about 11 feet tall, and the largest of those is about 20 feet wide.

Big impact is good when you feel a sense of responsibility with your work. In El Mac’s case, that means paying homage to regular people and those who have suffered injustices, many from the Chicano and Mexican culture in which he grew up.

“Doing work that is considerate, that is heartfelt, that has some soul to it, that is done with the intention of connecting with other people, and maybe moving people in some way, or inspiring people,” he says. “That’s an ideal that I definitely try to strive toward.”

It’s been that way from the beginning. El Mac mostly spent his childhood years in Phoenix, and he remembers feeling like there has always been a sense of public service to his impulse to paint—even with the unsanctioned graffiti of his early days.

“There are a lot of cities that are pretty grim, and there are a lot of parts of Phoenix that aren’t uplifting to the spirit,” El Mac says. “When you see some art, and you see some color ... it can be a reminder for people who are maybe down on their luck or on hard times, economically disadvantaged, whatever. It can be a reminder that there is more to life than just survival.”

The 35-year-old is self-taught. “I never went to art school,” he says. “But I kind of grew up in art school.” His mother is also a painter. She nurtured him with her artistic sensibility, museum visits, conversations and art books strewn about the house, as well as working in his presence. He was drawn to, and continues to be drawn to, rendering human faces and figures. El Mac’s distinct style of social realism has evolved over the years, with the structure of his lifelike images developed from repeating rippled lines.

It’s not the only thing that’s evolved over the years.

“As somebody who’s actually pretty introverted, painting graffiti and then transitioning into more sanctioned, official art projects has been a good way for me to interact with people in a way that is natural and comfortable, and I actually like it,” El Mac says. “In a weird way it’s part of, I guess, maturing and getting older. I’ve actually come to a point that I like talking.”

He laughs, then adds, “Sometimes.”



Courtesy El Mac



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El Mac: Aerosol Exalted

At the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center through Jan. 10, 2016.

The exhibit includes art from El Mac, as well as pieces from local artist Fuse. Be sure not to miss their collaborative work, which they painted together on-site specifically for this show.

Tickets: \$12 for non-members; free for members and children 12 and younger.

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