

## Carlos Ramirez: A Natural Equation

*Painting has a way of bringing me back full circle to my creative roots. It is my voice expressed and a personal exploration into a world purely of my own making. It allows me speak from my heart, to what moves and motivates me, while serving as a mirror of my inner being.*

Carlos Ramirez's joyous, deep paintings invite us to connect with him at a level beyond words. His large-scale abstractions are serene and yet buoyant, tethered yet open, intuitive yet structured—closing the gap between the dualities that exist in both life and painting.

*I am an explorer of ideas, I like to imagine something and then see if it works, and it often feels as though I'm working from both sides of my brain—the rational and the intuitive.*

Painting is for him a life-changing endeavor that he both loves and *must* do, and a part of his daily life. When not traveling to show the collections of his fashion house, *Liancarlo*, he spends evenings in his studio painting.

He brings to his artwork what he has brought for many years to his collections of couture gowns—a sense of timelessness and elegance. Cut from the same cloth, his paintings begin with his distinct lines developed for years in thousands of sketches for fabrics, embroideries, and clothing.

The paintings that have served as exquisite backdrops for his models are now front and center—emerging from many years of study and evolution.

*I begin collections with a series of sketches that borrow shapes from the natural world—which I slowly morph and abstract as I work. It is from this same place that I develop a painting. I am a sketcher by nature, so I begin each canvas with loose lines that borrow heavily from this internal garden. Though a lot of the lines are lost in the actual painting process, they set a mood and rhythm for the work and maintain a strong, vital connection to nature.*

When working he hangs multiple pieces in his studio space, but works on one painting at a time. Often he steps away to gain objectivity from the emotion he brings to the work, allowing things to settle before seeing his painting again with fresh eyes. He allows things to happen first and then edits—a process of working back and forth between line and transparent/opaque color.

Ramirez is an active practitioner of yoga, and compares the balance needed to stay in the moment while painting to that of the focus of yoga. “If you are not focused on the pose, you fall,” he says. For him, painting is both a balancing act as well as a dance, and watching him move back and forth between gesture and contemplation while engaged in the moment reflects this process.



An avid hiker, he often brings the outside world into his paintings, and those experiences subconsciously influence his work. Studying the painting titled *Slot Canyons at Tent Rocks* reveals his process. Ink line marks made with a

broken twig are coupled with more open areas of color and space that lead the eye gently into a circular movement that opens into a sky-like space.

This painting was reworked by the artist after putting the canvas away for some time, and he pulled it out later on and turned it upside down, added more lines and paint until, at some point, it felt right. At the moment of stepping back from the piece he remembered a hike he'd taken a few years prior through the mysterious canyons of red stone in New Mexico with a blue sky above him, taking him back to his experience in nature.

In a similar respect, *Coral Reef Key Largo* was created while he was working at an artists' residency. Distracted by interaction, he couldn't fully "see" the painting until he returned home and looked at it, realizing the influence of a "string of coral serendipitously moving through it"—the painting reflecting the ocean floor he saw while he was diving over reefs in the Florida Keys. This strong connection with nature always guides his sensibility. His paintings are organic and ripe with a deeply sensitive connection to life.

*In our harried, modern life, paintings can have a way of softening our man-made environments, a window to an emotional view of nature. I strive to strike a balance between the harmony and chaos that exists in the world.*

Ramirez has always been, at the core of his being, an artist and painter, and like many, has balanced that part of his being with a successful career. In December of 1989, he remembers being at a crossroads in his life, and he traveled to Sante Fe to take a break. After spending the first week

hiking in Death Valley and then the Grand Canyon, he felt the pull of the west—its blue skies and red earth—as well as a reconnection with a life-long dream of being a painter.

His company *Liancarlo* was then only nine years old, already established and selling nationwide, but for a moment, he wanted to give up the responsibility of that life. But he had obligations to fulfill.

He continued on and passionately grew his company while raising his daughter Genina, designing four original collections each year. Although his work left little time for painting early on, he put his creative energy into developing his brand, painting his own fabric prints, and fusing a cohesive collection year after year.

In time he was able to make painting a priority in his life, taking workshops with greats such as the painter Wolf Kahn who gave him permission to explore new things as a painter. Recalling a workshop with Kahn he remembers:

*At some point in that workshop, it dawned on me that art was not about rules and procedures... that was bullshit... it was about romance! Making someone's heart yearn for an image... falling in love with your art to the point that it took over your thoughts.*

His paintings are his *true* creative work, reflecting a passion for independence and individuality through an authentic voice that is not derivative or contrived. The underlying structure and rhythm of his paintings are grounded in drawing that serves as a container for gestural and expressive marks in the spirit of Abstract Expressionism.

Ramirez loves working large because he feels as though he has “fallen into the painting, and that it is has taken all control of [his] visual world for the moment.”

*This work in painting that I am doing now is a part of my evolution, and it is a natural progression from drawing into something more liberating and adventurous. But even more, it allows me to speak from a different place than before, in a whole new language... and often when I get to work on my painting, I have no clue what to do next, and then, it's almost as if by magic, things begin to happen....*

—Katherine Duncan Aimone, fine arts writer