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Local artist Amy Dryer expresses her travels, her muses and her life through her pieces

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Taken at her studio in downtown, Amy Dryer poses with some of her original art work influenced by German expressionism and personal storytelling. Photo by Deaniell Cordero.

Painter Amy Dryer is well-known for her artwork influenced by German expressionism. While people appreciate the vibrant colours and the big brushstrokes of her art, Dryer says that storytelling is at the heart of each piece.

“I really value art as part of our storytelling,” Dryer says. “It’s just essential that we not lose that.” Her art style comprises an incredible variety of colours and brushstrokes. She says the inspiration for her style comes from artistic movements in Germany before the First World War.

“I’m really attracted to German expressionism. So colour, big brushstrokes, expressive strong contrasts of colour, walking the line between representational and abstraction.”

In her downtown studio, there are numerous paintings of varying subjects and settings around every corner. Some hang on the walls, some stand against each other, but each one is unique in its colours and presentation.

The stories, however, hold the true value behind her paintings.

Starting out

Storytelling has been at the heart of Dryer's paintings since she was young. She recalls her earliest dalliance as an artist.

"My mom used to roll out large rolls of newsprint," Dryer says.

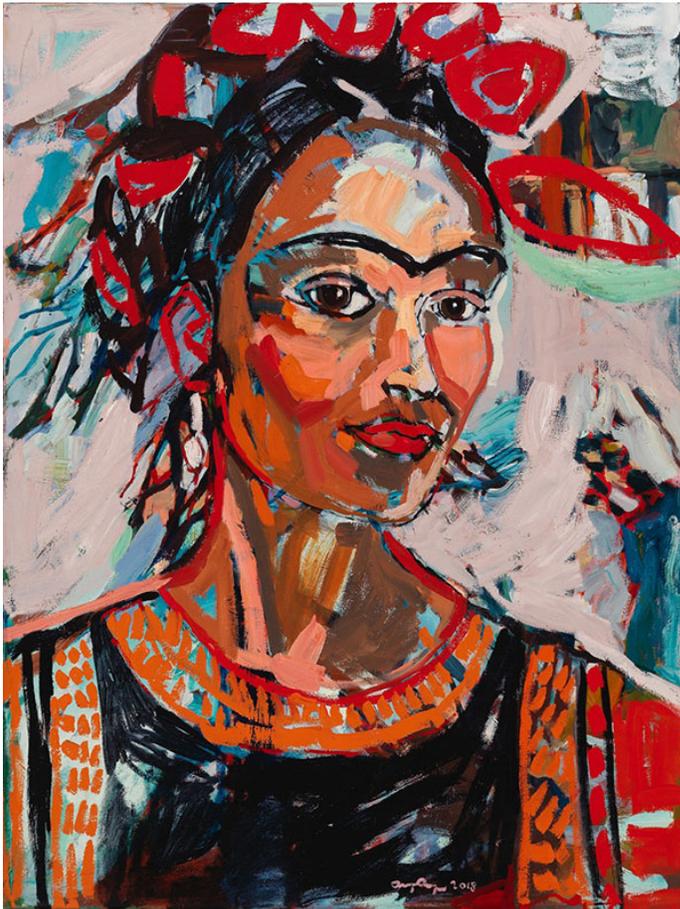
"She would roll them down the hall of the duplex we lived in, and my sister and I would draw on them for hours."

Dryer continued as an artist throughout junior high and high school, mixing and experimenting with different styles and techniques. After she graduated high school, she went to multiple universities to learn more about the arts and start building toward a full-time career as an artist.

She started at the Alberta College of Art and Design for two years before moving to Glasgow to attend the School of Art there. During her tenure, she received a call from Mount Allison University in New Brunswick to attend their program, so she moved back home to Canada and graduated there.

She recalls her memories from Mount Allison with fondness.

"There were quite a few artists that I just connected with, and we would have these paint nights where we all get together at the studio and we played music, and everyone would be painting and dancing and doing push ups in the hallway."



"Gaze"/ Oil on canvas/ 36x48/ 2018. Photo courtesy of Amy Dryer.

Dryer's works can be found in several galleries across Canada. In Calgary, she has been featured at Masters Gallery in Mission for the past four years.

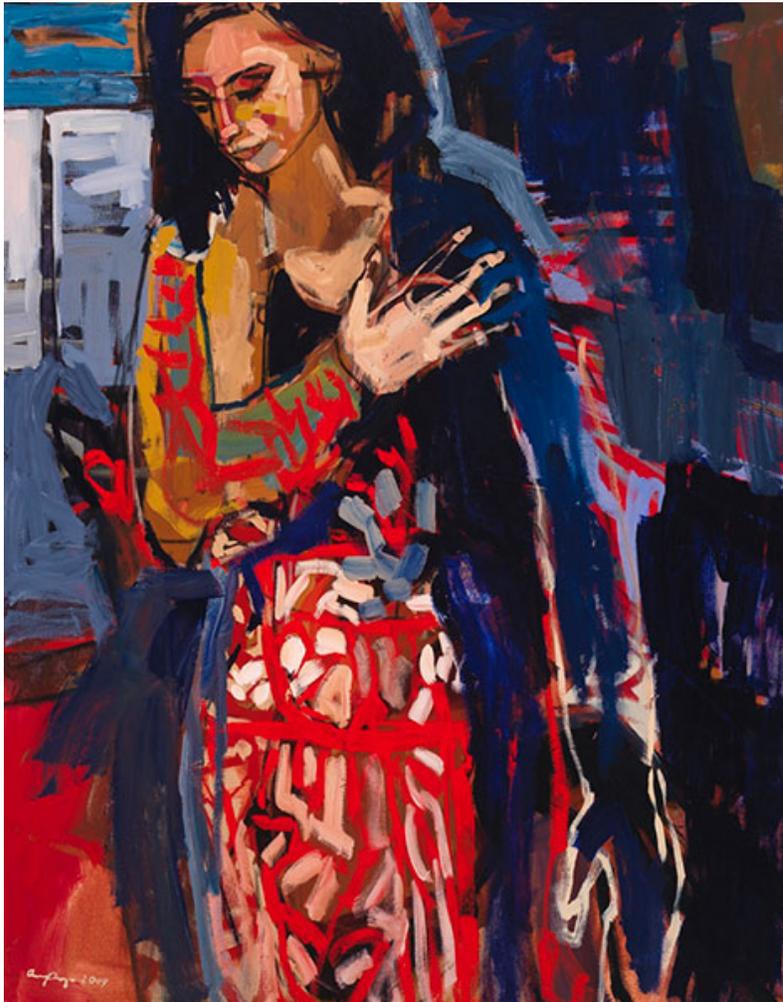
Megan Paterson, the manager of Masters, credits Dryer as one of the most popular artists on display.

"Her work is really colourful and lively, and it's got a lot of heart and life to it," Paterson says. "We love her artwork here and she's probably our best seller."

Where she chooses to display her art is something Dryer carefully considers. The galleries Dryer chooses holds personal significance to her, which is one of the reasons why she displays her art in the east coast.

"[My family] used to go out to New Brunswick every summer when I was a kid and play on the beach. And my parents are from there so I had lots of roots in eastern Canada so I felt connected to the gallery there."

Her artwork has also appeared on the TV series Fargo. According to Dryer, leading man Billy Bob Thornton liked her piece 'Patterns', a "slightly psychological and emotive self-portrait" of herself.



"Patterns" / Oil on canvas / 60x48 / 2009. Photo courtesy of Amy Dryer.

Dryer is a natural storyteller, and her works share stories of influential people and places that matter to her. Her official website is called Fragments of Soul, an appropriate name due to how Dryer views her artwork.

“I really like materials and quilts and all of these pieces that make up the whole of something. That’s basically how I see the canvases. There are all these big pieces of something that make up the whole of my life.”

One such influential person is Frida Kahlo, a Mexican artist from the early 1900’s. Dryer explains why Kahlo is her muse and has become an inspiration for a lot of her own work.

“[Kahlo] became a connecting point for me when I was having personal struggles and [she] just overcame so much through her own art ... That was so inspiring and so moving to me as an artist that she went through so much and was able to keep making art.”



Dryer eyes her artwork. She uses a large variety of media for her works, including oil paint. Canvases are hand-stretched and different brushes are needed to bring the painting to life. Photo by Deaniell Cordero.

Melanie Aikenhead, manager at Inglewood Arts Supplies, is a close friend of Dryer’s. They worked together at the store for some time and have been good friends since. She knows how much Kahlo means to her.

“[Kahlo] is very strong-willed and had to face a lot of adversity in her life,” Aikenhead says. “Her paintings have a very strong narrative and symbolism.

“I don’t believe that there’s a lot of women in art history as famous as Frida, and I think that [Dryer] would view her as some sort of a pioneer.”

The strong influence of German Expressionism and storytelling in Dryer’s paintings gives the public an insight into Dryer’s artistic and personal life, one fragment of her soul at a time.

