



Michelle Marra — Portrait by Anne Ogden of Lighthouse Reflections Photography

**Cover  
Story**

**Interview** WITH MICHELLE MARRA

## No Limits, Only Possibilities

Dive into the vibrant world of Michelle Marra's abstract art and experience her passion for color

**M**ichelle Marra creates art through color, texture, and light. Inspired by biomorphic forms and the movement of pleasing, impasto paint, Marra's work is joyful and spirited. Often starting with just a few guiding principles, such as color and mark-making, Marra allows for an accessible and intuitive process in her paintings. She began her artistic abstract journey in 2010 and has found creating to be a vital part of her life. Art on 7th represents her

in Hendersonville, NC; allison sprock fine art in Charlotte, NC and Charleston, SC; AnArte Gallery in San Antonio, TX; Studio Jeffrey Pa'n in Mystic, CT; and Wychwood Art in the UK.

**RRM:** Good abstract art, like good acting, looks easy, as I think anything done well can appear quite simple once finished. To make an abstract painting work, to evoke emotion, to have people study a single artwork for

years and still discover something new requires a tremendous skill set. Talk a little about your process and color's role in your work.

**Michelle Marra:** My mission every day is to become a better painter. I am constantly building on my knowledge of paint. When I painted traditionally, and I would paint a tree - it's pretty straightforward. But now that I have no constraints, the possibilities





Michelle Marra, "Summer Sings," acrylic on canvas, 44" x 54"

are endless. I paint daily, and I work on many different canvases at once. I love the challenge of making a dramatic painting that also gives a feeling of serenity. It's that juxtaposition that excites me. My work is joyful and colorful, using texture, line, and shape. I build layers of acrylic paint and mediums that, in the end, produce subtle and dramatic depth.

**RRM: Do your color choices have an overall meaning or message?**

**MM:** I don't consciously paint colors for the sole purpose of creating meaning or message. However, I want a joyous, upbeat painting, no matter the color. This type of painting one achieves through texture, line, and quality of brushstroke, whether you have color or not. Every once in a while, I like to challenge myself and paint a black-and-white painting; but my happy place is most definitely with color.

**RRM: I've always considered expressionism as a cynical perspective and abstract art as the intellectual counterpart. How do you generally view abstract art and its role in the**

**art world?**

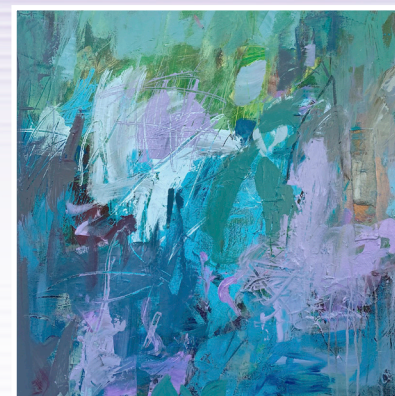
**MM:** We could discuss many nuances of the art world; however, I do think art is very subjective, and because I want to be seen as an intuitive painter that happens to work with most of the traditional rules, my goal is to engage you with color and texture first. And then I hope that the complexity seen as you get closer to the painting draws you in.

**RRM: I notice your works have this incredible depth, almost like peering through a dense forest or into a mist catching the late afternoon sun. How do you use color to create a sense of depth or spatial relationships in your work?**

**MM:** Thank you for noticing the depth I like building into a painting. My method requires that I layer colors, shapes, and lines until it is a pleasing and exciting composition. My traditional "rules" tell me to start from dark and build to a lighter painting. It doesn't always end up that way. I will start with a handful of premises to jump-start my first layers and after reflection, I may go in a different direction. My



Michelle Marra, "Misty Memories," acrylic on canvas, 20" x 20"



Michelle Marra, "Tempo and Rhythm," acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30"

constant struggle is keeping the painting light, fresh, and not overworked. Working through my "problem children" can be the most challenging but also my most satisfying in the end.

**RRM: Does color theory play a part in your work even though you work intuitively?**

**MM:** I most definitely work with color theory. It was ingrained in me as I learned all the traditional rules early. I paint with a triad - red, blue, yellow, and black and white. I mix my colors, and I might pivot on my original ideas during the layering process. I do find that I go through phases of favorite color combinations.

**RRM: I took a few of your paintings and switched them to black and white to get a sense of your hues and contrast and found they translate exceptionally well. Talk a little about hues and contrast in your work, and are they intentional from the beginning?**

**MM:** While working on my paintings, I also look at my work in black and white. Sometimes I look





Michelle Marra, "Lighthearted," acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30"



Michelle Marra, "Riding the Wave," acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36"

through a green or red lens to see where my cool and hot colors are. When a painting is not working, it's usually a problem with values, and a black-and-white observation helps me see where I need to go next. My goal in any of these observations is to make it a better painting while not overworking it. I strive to end each of my artworks with the same level of freedom and joy as I did in the beginning. It's the fear of "ruining" a painting that I don't want to fall prey to.

**RRM: What color palettes are you drawn to or frequently use in your work? And do you ever deliberately change your palette to something quite the opposite, maybe something outside of your comfort zone, like working against everything you know about how color needs to work? And are you satisfied with those results?**

**MM:** Aqua, blue and pink are usually found in my paintings. I am careful not to add too much black or white as they can take over a painting. Two colors I shy away from are blue-red and bright yellow. I am currently challenging myself with yellow as I love to tackle colors and make them sing. I had a commission

a while back, and the collectors loved royal blue and bright fuchsia together. I racked my brain on how I was going to make this work. I found a photo of a gorgeous Versace fabric and used it as my inspiration and was able to marry a group of colors I thought might not work together otherwise.

**RRM: Before the advent of computers, writers would have a dozen sheets of paper in the trash for every completed manuscript page. Do you restart and paint over works often? Or do you push and pull and splash a painting until it works? Or do you usually find your paintings coming together, maybe not effortlessly, but a reasonable distance from painful?**

**MM:** All of the above! I work the darks and lights or the push and pull of color; sometimes, I may risk repainting a previous painting altogether. During the pandemic, I challenged myself to use what I had in my studio, which meant repainting more often than not. I often say, "Some paintings paint themselves, and some are pure evil!" I never know which one I will get every day in the studio.

**RRM: Your art is collected nationally and internationally. Many people want to invest in art as art becomes a more significant commodity. What advice do you offer for those newer collectors in choosing art that they love and that will also be a wise investment?**

**MM:** My most sincere advice is to buy what you love. You will never regret it. I am lucky to spend my time painting and am thrilled when a collector buys my work. If I did my job, my artwork would give them joy for years to come. I would say the investment is in your happiness first. If the value goes up over the years, even better.

END

.....

**ART ON 7<sup>TH</sup>**

**Michelle Marra**

Tues-Sat 11-4 pm • Sun 12-4 pm,  
330 7th Ave E, Hendersonville, NC

(828) 595-9232 • arton7th.com

**Interview** WITH MICHELLE MARRA