

The Art of Issis Macias

Connecting to the Spirit of Creativity

By Jonathan Gramling

Issis Macias was a first generation Mexican American who grew up in the LA area, the daughter of conservative Catholic parents. She earned a degree in political science and public policy from UCLA and a master's in public administration from Cal State – Long Beach. She was going about a very traditional, "normal" life. And then Macias experienced two horrific events including brain surgery where she felt she was near death in 2012 that revealed to her that life was too precious and guaranteed to no one.

And then she has a chance — some might call it destiny — encounter with the LA arts scene after a night of partying with some friends and visiting Spaniards.

"It was 3-4 a.m.," Macias said. "When we went to our car that was parked in front of the Terrell Moore Art Gallery, Terrell Moore the artist walked out of the gallery, so it was open. We asked what was going on. He was like, 'Hello, welcome to my gallery.' He invited us in. He had a live/work place where the front was the gallery and the back was his private studio. We hung out with him and played music. We became friends. I hung out with them and was invited to gallery shows. Through him, I met one of my best friends. I got to learn more about the LA art scene. I met a number of artists. It was the first time in my life that I had actually been exposed to artists in a much more personal manner."

Macias came in touch with the artist within her. Although she had never had an art class, Macias was drawn to create and began to develop an abstract art style. And when her future husband got a job at UW-Madison, she came with him and got a job with Clean Water Alliance.

"When I came to Madison and I saw the lakes, especially Lake Mendota, I seriously felt like my soul was replenished because there was so much water," Macias said about coming from arid Southern California. "It's like I had this great thirst that was finally satisfied. It was really incredible, just the energy and the nature and the water."

Macias became pregnant and took leave from Clean Water Alliance and then the pandemic hit. She was laid off and fretted about what she would do beyond caring for her newborn daughter.

"I was a bit nervous in terms of my identity and what I was going to do," Macias said. "But my husband was like, 'Well, be an artist. You're an artist. Be your paintings.' That's where I have been focusing my energy, which is challenging because now I have a toddler. She's a lot of work. Just disconnecting from her in order to be in my spaces to create art takes a lot of work. It is definitely challenging. But I've learned to disconnect in quick spurts of time. 'Okay, what can I do to this canvas in 20 minutes?' And then I will come back to it."

While she hadn't sold a painting before she moved to Madison, she has become quite accomplished and was invited to exhibit at the 2021 Art Fair on the Square.

"I met my youngest art collector," Macias said

with a chuckle. "He was 10-years-old. He bought one of my paintings. It was so inspiring because he was with his parents and he was looking at all of my paintings and he found a five by seven and he said, 'This is it. I want this one. I'm going to take it. It's going into my room. Mom and dad, let me borrow your credit card.' It was cute because he went in and he knew what he wanted. He purchased it and then asked if he could take a picture with me. I told him absolutely. He was so excited. That made me feel amazing because it was great that I have art that speaks even to a 10-year-old. That was the greatest compliment of that whole weekend."

Macias' art work is an abstraction of colors that are pulled from her soul in a subconscious way, as if her hand that holds the brush makes strokes on canvas without a thought.

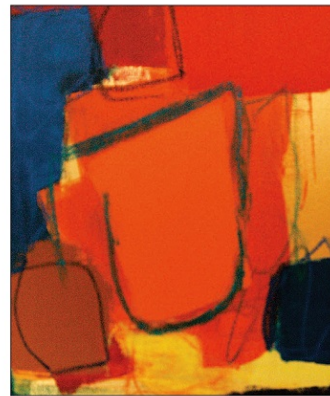
"It opened in my life and just allowed me to access my creativity and my pain and my inspiration and my own life," Macias said about the moment when she started painting. "And so, that's how I just started to paint. I've been painting since then. And my work is very intuitive-based. Painting for me is very meditative. When I paint, I don't have a lot on my mind in terms of thought process or what is going to happen. I try to connect with my inner soul, myself. I'm drawn to colors and nature. I've gotten a lot of feedback from different people about my work. They like the way that I choose my colors or how the colors come through my painting."

Like many other artists, Macias' craft has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I actually started doing more squares with oil pastels during the pandemic in 2020," Macias said. "I feel now the reason for that is I wanted to convey how during the pandemic, we were all limited to our homes. With some of my pieces that I have done recently, I have the abstract colors and textures. And then at the end of the painting, I will go in and draw squares with different colors in pastels. My husband is my worst and best critic. He would come and say, 'I don't like your squares.' I would tell him, 'I don't care.' For whatever reason, they are calling me now. And I realized that it was this feeling of us being confined in our homes and our spaces. With all of the vibrant colors and everything free-flowing and naturally finding their way on the canvas, then adding these squares kind of gave the painting a different compartment. I would then see different details of the painting that you normally do not see in an abstract painting unless you get really up close and you pay attention to the detail and how the colors interact with each other. With these squares, I feel like I'm pulling the reviewer's eyes already. 'You should look at this area.'"

There is that inner force that draws Macias to paint. And because of that, Issis Macias fills our world with pastels of emotions that become real within our souls if we only let them.

For more information about Issis Macias' work, visit www.issismacias.com.



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