

The logo features a large, stylized letter 'M'. The left vertical stroke is white, and the right vertical stroke is a golden-brown color. Below the 'M' is the text 'arts journal' in a white, sans-serif font, followed by a registered trademark symbol (®).

M
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The background is an abstract architectural illustration. It features a series of overlapping, angular planes in shades of blue, green, and yellow, suggesting a modern building's facade. A prominent dark green horizontal band cuts across the middle. The bottom section consists of solid-colored blocks in shades of orange, black, and purple.

**THE ART &
ARCHITECTURE ISSUE**

**ANDY BURGESS:
RE-ENVISIONING MODERNISM**

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ANDY BURGESS

Re-Envisioning Modernism

By Editor Kriss Perras



ANDY BURGESS

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London-born, his works are influenced by the great modernist architecture in Europe and America. Currently residing in Tucson, Arizona, much of his recent works focuses on the mid-century modernists from Southern California. Burgess' representations of buildings are distilled down to the essentials of geometric forms and bold colors, establishing a pared-down aesthetic that embraces the abstract. His art is reduced to shape, color and rhythm much like Piet Mondrian. This is Andy Burgess re-envisioning modernism.

Q&A:

MAJ: How did you become interested in painting modernist architecture?

ANDY: I've always enjoyed the look of modern architecture, and growing up in London there were some great examples of early modernist housing. In fact, lots of the seminal European modernist architects practiced in London at some point in time. Near where I lived in Hampstead, there was some famous modernist architecture from the 1930's, such as the Sun House, designed in 1935 by Maxwell Fry, and a pioneering work of the modern movement in England. The house is still there today. It has white rendered concrete and a flat roof and curved balconies with tubular steel railings. It's totally different to everything around it, which is mostly traditional Victorian or Arts and Crafts style architecture. For a brief time in London, Fry was in partnership with Walter Gropius, the former director of the Bauhaus.

Of course, London was also full of Art Deco architecture, and a good deal of that was also very modern and minimal and shared

similar ideals to the "International Style". So my interest was sparked from an early age.

As a painter I have always been drawn to abstraction. At college I painted "grid" paintings. At a certain point I felt stifled by not having an "exterior" subject to paint, so I "turned around," as it were, and looked out of the studio window and started painting cityscapes, rooftops and buildings, finding the abstract qualities I wanted in the geometry and receding planes of the city. I guess it was inevitable that eventually I would turn my attention from buildings in general to modern architecture in particular.

But the last ten years of investigation into modern and mid-century architecture really just started as a research project for my own amusement and distraction. In a Moleskin notebook, I started making notes from reading I was doing and making quick pencil studies to accompany the notes. After a while the pencil drawings got more detailed and started taking longer, and the project morphed from research to art-making.

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MAJ: Can you describe your process from selecting the building through to the completed work?

ANDY: The first paintings I did in this vein were of really iconic buildings that seemed to me to be defining examples of their genre. I think the first painting in the whole series was of the Rietveld Schroder House in Utrecht in Holland, designed and built in 1924 by the Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld. Rietveld was one of the founders and principal members of the De Stijl movement, and the Schroder house is the greatest example of De Stijl architecture.

The thing that most fascinated me is that another important member of De Stijl was the wonderful painter Piet Mondrian, and the Schroder House is like a three-dimensional

painting, intersecting lines and flat planes of color. I felt a strong kinship with Mondrian and his quest to reduce the world to abstract essentials. Painting my version of this house was the perfect way to explore my love of modern architecture and abstraction and pay homage to the historical relationship between the two!

Oddly enough the second house I painted was the Stahl house in Los Angeles, also known as Case Study House #22, one of the most famous examples of mid-century architecture in America. I hadn't visited the house. I had no real understanding of its

significance at that time, but I was drawn to the complete abstraction of it, it's severe geometry and receding lines of steel. I took images I found online and just deconstructed them into shapes and reconstructed them as paintings. I wasn't interested in a realistic interpretation. Rather I wanted to play a game of using the architecture as a starting point to make a painting that was like a jigsaw of forms, colorful abstract shapes that explore the illusion of space in paint.

Subsequently I culled images from books and online sources, and my main objective

was to find a starting point for an abstracted composition that I found compelling. Generally I make a few pencil studies from the found photograph until the drawings become their own thing.

Then usually I make a tiny watercolor or gouache study based on the drawings. After that I might work on a smallish acrylic or oil study on panel, and then if the image is still compelling I'll scale it up to a large oil on canvas. Eventually, after these various stages the house or building in the final painting is quite transformed from the original photograph. Occasionally they remain very recognizable, but often they are almost entirely re-imagined with simplified forms and an invented color palette that is a deliberate leap away from realism.

I started to paint iconic mid-century architecture in LA and Palm Springs that I could readily visit and get inspiration from.



Wexler Steel House with Zig Zag Roof © Andy Burgess



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When I moved to America in 2009 and found myself living in Tucson, Arizona, my paintings became suffused with the light of the southwest and a more saturated color palette. Of course my attention switched from early European modernist architecture to the wonderful flowering of mid-century modern architecture in America. So I started to paint iconic mid-century architecture in LA and Palm Springs that I could readily visit and get inspiration from.

MAJ: Your work has a transformative quality that distills the subject into simple geometric shapes. This brings to mind Piet Mondrian's later abstracts such as *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*. Are there specific artists that have influenced your work?

ANDY: Well of course you are spot on with your referencing of Mondrian. As I've already mentioned, Mondrian was a key figure in my artistic development. Up close his paintings are really beautiful too, not cold or clinical in any way, but rather full of sensitivity and feeling. Another very obvious influence, which would be hard to ignore is David Hockney. Obviously comparisons are made because like Hockney before me I've immigrated to the U.S., and I've painted swimming pools. I always loved Hockney from way back when I was a student. I particularly like his experimentation, playfulness and joyful use of color. Hockney is an amazing draughtsman too and has a wonderful fluid facility with paint. He's the real deal. Like Hockney everything I do is also indebted to Picasso in some way. Cubism really changed everything and the freedom

to deconstruct the world in paintings was a lot more accepted after Cubism.

There are a ton of other painters that have influenced me, and it would be impossible to mention them all. But amongst them are some wonderful American painters. Two that spring to mind are the painters Stuart Davis and Richard Diebenkorn. Davis isn't a household name by any means, but in the 1940's and 1950's he painted these fantastic colorful abstracted city scenes that are like the painted equivalents of jazz music. They are so vibrant and full of life. Diebenkorn was a really serious artist who moved between abstraction and representation. Like Hockney he was a great draughtsman and a great colorist. He also sought to somehow distill the decorative qualities of Matisse and the intense observation of Cezanne.

MAJ: What else inspires you?

ANDY: I believe very strongly that artists should be as open minded as possible and take inspiration from all the other art forms, be it poetry or product design, theatre or food. I think you are more likely to make more compelling and relevant artwork if you come from an informed position and an engagement with the world around you. I read a lot, and I'm always on the lookout for new music and art. I'm also a "collector" of stuff, which brings it's own obsessive mindset! Over the last few years I've been collecting vintage ephemera and also art, photography and photography books, and that really inspires me. I'm especially inspired by art and design that is minimal and







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abstract, and things which are analogue and hand-made. Instagram has been really fun for discovering contemporary artists. I have quite eclectic tastes. I like artwork that is very quiet and monochrome. I also love it when artists can use strong and bold color in surprising ways.

MAJ: You have several bodies of other work; your pop geometry paintings, collages, and photography. How would you describe the common thread or vocabulary connecting these works?

ANDY: I think that all my work is involved with abstraction in some form or another: putting shapes together in interesting ways, or finding simplicity from complexity and vice versa. When I paint, even if I'm painting something objective and representational like a house, I seem to construct the paintings, consciously or unconsciously, as if they were collages of colored shapes. So maybe all the collage that I do, the obsessive sorting, cutting, arranging and pasting tiny bits of found and vintage paper, is a way to play, or rather create patterns in a playful and more spontaneous way. Similarly, when I am outside with a camera I'm always looking for strong shapes and color and intense contrasts of light and shadow. That actually seems to be the subject of my work. So, as far as I'm concerned there really is a strong connection between everything I do. It's all about how color and light makes you feel and think.

MAJ: How did you come to earn the prestigious invite to Tandem Press to collaborate

with the master printmakers there?

ANDY: I met Amy Newell, one of the Tandem curators, and Jason Ruhl, one of the master printmakers, at the Palm Springs Art Fair a few years ago. They came to see my work, and I think they were drawn to it's graphic and tactile qualities and saw the possibility to explore that in print-making. They put my name forward to the director Paula Panczenko, and a few months later I got a call from Paula asking me if I'd like to fly to Madison, Wisconsin to do a residency at Tandem! I was so flattered and excited. It was an amazing opportunity and such a privilege. I went for two weeks and worked with all three master printmakers in different media. I made a quite complex color lithograph with Joe Freye, which was a labor of love. I also worked on a mixed media print constructed as a collage with Jason and a couple of relief prints that we made on a Vandercook press. In addition I completed a set of etchings with Bruce Crownover. It was a very intense couple of weeks for sure. I think the first visit went so well that they invited me back only a few months later to make some companion pieces to the ones I had done. I also had the chance to make a woodcut, so now I really feel invested in exploring all the different forms of printmaking.

MAJ: What other projects do you have coming up? Exhibitions? Books?

ANDY: 2018 is shaping up to be a big year for me. I have a Museum show opening at The Tucson Museum of Art in February, which will be called *Mid-Century Perspectives*. I will





Sun House © Andy Burgess



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Stahl House © Andy Burgess

have around thirteen or fourteen paintings on show with some prints and a display vitrine of sketchbooks and working materials. The Museum director is choosing some iconic pieces of mid century furniture to display alongside. At the same time the first major book of my modernist house paintings is going to be published by Nazraeli Press, based in California. Nazraeli are really famous for their photography books, but they wanted to publish my paintings, which is a big compliment. I'm very excited about both of those things!

In March I'm going to have a small pop-up show of some of my "Picasso-esque" guitar collages at Etherton Gallery in Tucson. These are little cubist collages made from

vintage papers and are an homage to Picasso. I really enjoy making them.

In May I'll be exhibiting again at Art New York with my London Gallery, The Cynthia Corbett Gallery, although Cynthia is also reminding me to hold paintings back for a solo show in London in 2019, so that's going to be quite a juggling act!

In addition I'll be showing work at various times with Fabrik Projects in Los Angeles and Sue Greenwood in Laguna Beach. Now that I live in the desert South West it's really nice to be building relationships with great West Coast galleries.

ON THE WEB:

andyburgessart.com



Kaufman House II © Andy Burgess