In Conversation With Artist Michelle Poirier-Mozzone

"The broken ribbons of sunlight, bizarre reflections, fascinating distortions and the weightless, slow dance of movement below the water's surface"

By Glorious
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Capturing the transient nature of water is one of the biggest challenges for an artist, but Michele Poirier-Mozzone takes it all in her stride. Working in oil and pastel, the American painter has been focusing on underwater paintings for ten years, creating pieces that instil a sense of peace, movement and levity. Using swim mad friends and family as inspiration, which point you – or Bear – in models, the pieces present a surreal, poolside lifestyle with masterly brushstrokes, vivid colours and playful perspectives. Here we speak to the artist about the human body, the transformative power of sunlight and being the 'worst swimmer in the family'.

Bella Oil on Linen

Glorious Q: Where and when did you discover your talent for painting?

Michele Poirier-Mozzone MPM: I have been interested in art for as long as I can remember. I was the kid sitting with my sketchbook drawing people and portraits for hours in my room, copying figures from a fashion magazine and being the over-dramatic artist in my family. I was always passionate about what I loved to do. My natural path was to major in art in college and graduate with a Bachelor Degree in Fine Art.

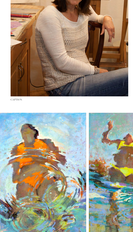
Glorious Q: They are sun in the family! MPM: I have three children and they are my inspiration for my work. Bear is a wonderful figurative of painter who is known for her atmospheric depictions of the female form. We were lucky enough to have a mother/daughter show on Cape Cod in August of 2017 and it was an exceptional moment we will never forget. After a year of hard work and preparation, we hung the show and Bear and I were hanging together with family and friends around us. It is ironic that we both paint the figure and water - Lydia's work focuses on body image with steamy shower glass. Lydiaclifton.com

Big Sur Oil on Gallery Board

Q: Talk us through the creation of your 'Fractured Light' series. We love the way you capture the body when it is almost perceptive looking up through the water. How did the idea for the series come about? MPM: I love the idea of sunlight, the bright and the underwater painting, came about after a disappointing foray into abstract painting and an afternoon photographing my daughter in our pool. I found the underwater distortions and play of light extraordinary. I decided it couldn't hurt to try painting her figure in the water and I was immediately captivated by the process and never look and waiting. I began to receive a lot of recognition with this new body of work and it has continued to evolve over the past ten years. I have taken a couple of breaks from this series to paint other subject matter, but the vast majority of my work explores the figure and how it is affected by water.

The motivation behind this body of work is twofold. First, it allows me to paint what I love the human form. But this series also gives me the opportunity to explore areas of pure abstraction that exist naturally in turbulent sunlight distorted water.

I take video footage of my models with a GoPro camera. It takes a lot of footage to capture just the right image to inspire a painting! My models are often one of my daughters, myself or friends. I am interested in the process of painting and talking about capturing a unique experience, moment or idea. Most of us have experienced the sound of bubbles rushing past our ears, the broken ribbons of sunlight, bizarre reflections, fascinating distortions and the weightless, slow dance of movement below the water's surface. It is a sensory experience that I want to share. Bubbles are ideas and intuitions that rise to the open air while each figure is interpreted as reacting to a moment in this surreal, wet world.



Leaning Pelle Oil on Linen

"TRANSFORMATIVE"

Q: You often use pastels and oils, do you use any other mediums? Do you think you will ever move away from these? MPM: For my underwater series I have been using oil and pastel. Each medium has its transluscence and inherent beauty. For years ago I decided to try something different and began to take workshops in pastel. I quickly came to appreciate the medium's expressiveness and immediacy while developing this series. For over thirty years I have been painting in oil and I am continually impressed with the way oil adds texture, richness and depth of colour. Oil also lends itself well to larger format paintings.

Lydia Oil on Linen

Q: Your series shows the female form in a distorted way, in water, you capture the colour shape and line distortions that occur underwater. Why do you feel this is important to capture in your work? Is female body image something you ever think about? MPM: I don't have male models as often as female, but I do enjoy incorporating male figures into my work. I think the female form is incredibly beautiful. As a woman and mother of three girls, I feel it is important to expressing this subject matter from a female perspective.

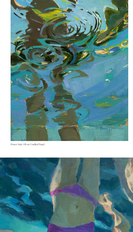
Body image is often an underlying idea in the pieces where the figure is very distorted by form, for example, I created a piece titled "Transformation" and I was thinking about the phrase "Change". They were all self-reflective and experimental with words and phrases incorporated into the layers of pastel. I wrote and scribbled my thoughts about aging, body image and the passing of time into these pieces and each one was distinctly cathartic for me.

Q: Do your best about the 'digital age' for artists? Do you think it will affect the way we consume or buy work in the future? MPM: Instagram has been an amazing asset to me as an artist. I have been offered many wonderful opportunities and I adore the online digital platforms. For example, I was recently offered a solo show in Paris, France. I would never have considered such a show but think it will continue to evolve in ways that will more easily allow access to the products we buy - including art.

Q: Do you think being a woman helps or hinders you in the art world? MPM: Unfortunately, there has always been a gender bias against women in art. Historically, female artists were generally overlooked while their male counterparts achieved success - either during their lifetime or posthumously. Fortunately, this has changed dramatically and female artists today flourish. Several years ago, there is still a distinct void of female artists in many exclusive galleries offering "investment grade" art. I do see a glass ceiling in the art world and hope there are some up and coming women artists who will soon break it.

Splashes Oil Oil on Canvas

"PERSPECTIVE"



Swimming Pool Oil on Board Canvas

Q: Yes I love the way your paintings capture the sense of fun and freedom that swimming provides. Is swimming a big part of your life when not painting? Do you enjoy any other sports? MPM: My husband coached my daughter's swim team in high school, so yes, swimming is a big part of our family. I am the worst swimmer in the family, but I love tennis, working out at the gym and am learning to play squash.

Green Oil on Gallery Board

Q: What advice would you give to a budding female artist? MPM: Pursue your passion with a serious work ethic and you will improve and achieve what you never thought possible. Join associations where groups of artists gather; they become your support system and provide a wealth of information and mentorship. Say yes to opportunities that come your way - even if you feel unqualified or unready - this pushes you out of your comfort zone, makes you grow and brings unexpected benefits your way. Don't settle for mediocre work - always present your best work. Be your own harshest critic and continuously challenge yourself and the worth of your artwork. Don't downplay your work. Be proud of what you do.

Q: What is next and where can we find you? MPM: I currently have work in a gallery in Paris and I am also exhibiting at Tambaran Gallery in New York City. Tambaranart.com

My work can be found at:

Coastal Contemporary Gallery - coastalcontemporarygallery.com, Newport RI

Noelle Gallery - Noellegallery.com, Westport, CT

Tambaran Gallery - Tambaranart.com , New York City

My Instagram account: @MichelleMoz

Website: Poirier-Mozzone.com

Splashes Oil on Canvas