

eric firestone gallery

AUGUSTMAN



From Subway Cars To Museums: Futura Discusses The Evolution Of His Artform

BY: RICHARD AUGUSTIN, JAN 15 2023 5:00 PM

A pioneer in graffiti, Futura needs little introduction. The artist has blazed a trail in the world of art that is as colourful as the stunning art pieces he has produced throughout his career. Born in the mid-50s in New York, Futura (born Leonard Hilton McGurr) was one of the earlier pioneers of the graffiti movement.

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An abstract painter whose practice developed in New York during the 1970s, he was one of the earliest graffiti artists to introduce abstraction into his work. His works garnered attention, paving the way for him to become one of the first street artists to exhibit at contemporary art galleries in the early 1980s.

Early exhibitions of his work include presentations at Patti Astor's Fun Gallery and Tony Shafrazi Gallery, as well as within the historic Times Square show of 1980, alongside Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Rammellzee, and Kenny Scharf. He also famously collaborated with the punk band The Clash, designing their album art and painting on large-scale canvases behind the band as they performed in concert.

A Natural Evolution



Image Credit: Futura/Instagram

Over the years, Futura has evolved his art form. He adopted the moniker Futura 2000 later on in his career. He also expanded his repertoire, collaborating with Takashi Murakami and working alongside the late Virgil Abloh on collections for Off-White and Louis Vuitton.

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In the last several years, the artist has continued expanding his repertoire, exhibiting his works in museums and galleries across the globe. In 2020, the Noguchi Museum presented Futura Akari, an installation of Akari light sculptures. He also created a large site-specific installation at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. He was included in the exhibition Writing the Future: Basquiat and the Hip Hop Generation at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

This year, a selection of artworks by the artist will be on show at Eric Firestone Gallery's booth as part of the Art SG Art Fair. Held from 12-15 January 2023, the showcase will see new works from the artist being exhibited. Credited for bringing abstract painting to the street art genre and blending art historical tradition of Abstract Expressionism with the spontaneity and energy of urban art-making, the opportunity to view pieces from Futura is an opportunity that's not to be missed.

Ahead of the showcase, AugustMan talks to the man himself, discussing his work as a graffiti pioneer, the evolution of his artform, and his love for spray painting.



Image Credit: Shilei McGurr

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You're widely celebrated as the 'Godfather of Graffiti'. Did you ever imagine the art form becoming so widely accepted?

Well first, let's not call me the 'Godfather of Graffiti'. That's something I would blame on the media, as those words would never come out of my mouth. To answer the question, though, no, I could never imagine we would create an entire culture and global community from the illegal activities of our origins.

When you started out, did you ever imagine your art would be featured in galleries and museums?

No, I didn't, initially, I was just trying to develop my own style and territory. I was in the moment, and quite frankly at the time museums, institutions intimidated me.

You were the first to introduce abstract painting in graffiti. Was this a gradual or intentional shift for you?

It was a space no one had explored. In 1980, my 'Break Train' was an example of taking ownership of such abstract spaces. Once again, I would like to consider myself an original.



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Would you consider this an intentional evolution of your art form?

Yes, the very fact that my work has been seen around the planet, allows me to introduce a new audience to my form of creative expression. And the work, is always evolving.

Did you experience any trepidation in showcasing your earlier abstract pieces?

I feel very critical of the earlier work. But there are, of course, some amazing pieces from my historical archive. Pick a decade: 80's 90's 00's and beyond.



Image Credit: Shilei McGurr

Spray paint continues to be your go-to tool/medium; what do you love about it?

The spontaneous nature of the medium, the years of physical practice, and muscle memory.
Yeah, I love spray-paint.

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We've seen your artwork on furniture, bottles, and clothes. What interests you most about these collaborations?

They're all different and the applications are different. It's also about promoting my brand, FUTURA LABORATORIES, which was established more than 25 years ago.

You're on Masterclass. Did you ever imagine you'd be teaching and inspiring artists?

That was a great opportunity to work with Masterclass, which has such a diverse group to learn from. I hope the viewers enjoyed the program.



You had your first solo exhibition in Singapore in 2019. How was that experience for you?

It was awesome, and still memorable, as you may know, the show entitled 'CONSTELLATION', was an indirect connection to the first time I had arrived in Singapore back in 1975.

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Can you share with us what you will be revealing/showcasing in Singapore during the upcoming SG Art Fair?

Not to give anything away – “New Work”.

Being in art this long, what continues to inspire you?

Life.



Image Credit: Shilei McGurr

(Images: Courtesy of Futura/Featured Image: Shilei McGurr)

A selection of works by Futura will be presented at Eric Firestone Gallery (Booth #1D01) at Art SG held at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre. More information [here](#).

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