

**Welcome to Fulton Street Collective's Artist Spotlights. I'm Matt Raebel, and today I will be interviewing Amber Kouba.**

MR: By the way, I wanted to thank you for taking the time to come and meet with me here...I had a joke involving, "oh, thank you for joining me here at *your* studio; was it hard to find?" But we ended up not recording in the studio, so...

AK: We're close to it! [Laughs]

MR: We are! It is down the hallway from where we're actually recording...I think a good place to start would be to ask you how you found Fulton Street Collective? Did you find it through a search engine, were you referred by a friend, did you....?

AK: So, I'm actually good friends with Alex [Puryear], and before I heard about Fulton Street Collective, I probably had known him for about 2-3 years. I put a post on Facebook saying I was looking for a studio space. He let me know where he was, and kind of let me know what the deal was - said there was this really cool collective. I checked out the website and found my way here!

MR: Yeah, he's a really interesting guy. I really dig his style. Actually, it seems you and him have a lot of similarities in terms of style; you use a lot of vibrant colors, a lot of interesting kind of contrasts between form and formlessness. What I wanted to ask you is, what is the relationship between form and color in the work that you do?

AK: That's a really good question...so, I think the big thing for me is, the more I paint and the more I get to know myself as an artist is that...I really like to play with non-form, and just really highlight color, and I think the big reason I do that and the reason I'm like drawn to it, is that you can take any situation - any experience - and put color to it. It could be the darkest of experiences, it could be the most painful of experiences...it could also be the most joyful and you can still find beauty and texture and humanity in it when you just break it down into color. I think sometimes when you put a form to it, there is an implied reaction - there is a guiding light on how you're supposed to react to something. But when you break it down to just color - and, in essence, energy - there is, I think, a more personal response to it, and anyone can look at a particular experience and connect with it that way without having to put a wall up instantly. If they see something dark.

MR: Right. Even beautiful pictures have a lot of dark colors usually.

AK: Yeah, exactly.

MR: That's interesting that you bring up energy, because I know that you also - I don't want to put words in your mouth by saying "define yourself as" a psychic artist, but I have seen that being a psychic is something that's very important to you, in terms of your art. And it's

interesting - we have lots of different kinds of artists at FSC, but I don't know if we've ever had a psychic artist before.

AK: [Laughs]

MR: So, because of that lack of exposure I was really excited to ask you - what defines a psychic artist?

AK: I think the biggest thing is - I feel like anyone who's creating art, or is in this playing field, is being psychic. I feel like most people in their daily lives are having psychic experiences, but not necessarily defining them as "psychic." And I think the big thing for me is, I really wanted to go into creating and letting people know that, this artistic experience - this way that I connect to the world - it's being psychic, and it happens every single day. And I think the other thing is, I didn't really get into being a creative or painting when I grew up, you know, being a creative was "a waste of time." I was really guided towards more practical ways of living, more practical ways of going about life, and when I started taking classes at a psychic school - and I've taken about four years worth of training - I started opening up this clairvoyant aspect of me that sees colors and sees energy and sees pictures, and I was seeing so much...and it was validated. How much I was seeing was so validated in my experience that I needed an outlet because I was seeing so much. I was connecting to so much. So being psychic, like - seeing color, or pre-planning your day and envisioning it, you know...you're being psychic. If you pick up on someone's feelings, you're being psychic. Sometimes you know that you should've turned left - you have no idea why you're turning left, but there's a car accident ahead of you, and something inside you said, "turn left." You know? There are these psychic phenomena happening all the time, and I like to use my painting as a way to kind of capture how I'm experiencing it, and color is a very important aspect of how I experience being psychic.

MR: What was it like going through a psychic school? Were there classes? How was it structured?

AK: It was very structured...I went actually to Envision, a school for psychics. They have their office in River North, and...I've taken about six trainings, which are 22 weeks long - I've taken six of them, all different ways of developing my clairvoyance. And it was very structured. I think the biggest thing is, it teaches you how to go inward, and how to look at yourself and connect to aspects of yourself that...they really just give you the permission to do that. To make it about you, to make your life about you. That's kind of what I do with my art - I make it about me, I make it about my experiences, I make it about how I'm seeing the world. I didn't know until I started taking classes there that I wasn't making my life about me, and I wasn't making how I see the world about me. Like, I used to see the world was the way I was taught. And now, I see it in a completely different way, and half the time it doesn't make sense, but it still has value. But I think through art, I'm able to delve into this very empathic part of me, this part that feels very deeply, and paint with it, and put it on canvas, and see my emotions through color on this canvas, and then - it's a way of release, it's a healing way to go through some of those emotions

that I want to kind of process and have for myself...and I'm always amazed kind of what comes out onto the canvas, of just like..."wow, that's my story. I just captured my story in color and movement." Other times, I'm very intuitive, and like - I just pick a color, or I pick a set of colors. And I don't know what it's gonna look like, but I just start working with these colors and it will ignite the emotions sometimes. And other times, I just see colors - I see a pattern of color, a movement of color, and I have to paint it. And I like to tell people that, how I see it - and I think a lot of artists can agree with this - how I see it is never really transferred to the canvas as brightly or as colorful as I see it - or, I can't really evoke as much of the movement as I see. I'm still learning how to do that.

MR: You said sometimes that your work surprises you. Can you tell me about a time that something you created surprised you?

AK: Oh man, that happens all the time...so, actually, this last painting I just did, it's a pretty big piece...I've been working on it for about six months, and I got stuck about halfway through, and I didn't know what to do with it. I knew how I wanted it to end, I knew like - because I was kind of working on it in chronological order, kind of depicting a transformational process - and I knew the energy I wanted to end up at. And I was stuck, so...I just painted the "stuck-ness." And I just painted black, because, "this is where I'm at," you know? And the ending ended up being where I needed it to be - and I actually surprised myself because looking at it, I was like, "is that not the thing about life?" That, where you want to go - the thing you want to grow into, or change or become, you probably handle all of this "stuck-ness," this black energy - some people will turn around, and go back. And crazy people like me will dive in headfirst to get to the thing behind it. That's what really surprised me. It put what kind of person that I am, and like - what I'm looking for in this life, the growth...a lot of people will say, "that's too much black," and, "why would you want to go that way?" And I'm like, "well, that's where the gold is. That's where I want to be - behind that, past that." And that's what really surprised me - to kind of see that unfold on canvas.

MR: Do you have a favorite piece?

AK: [Sighs] Ohhhhh....I think my favorite piece right now would have to be one that I just finally convinced myself that I'm done with. I've been working on it for about 9 months now...oh, almost 12 months actually! So it's been a full year and I've just been layering paint, and texture, and color. I think my favorite thing is, I feel like I captured my passion - the color of passion for me, and the duality of my passion, in the painting. And when I see it, there's this urge to be like, "it's not done yet." And the truth is, my passion is going to change and evolve and become something different. So there is that part where, it's not "done" yet, and I think that I'm correct, I think it's going to change - but the painting itself is done. I think I captured a moment of this search, this exploration of trying to find, "well what does my passion feel like? What does my passion look like? Where is my passion? And I think on this piece, I found it. I just looked at it and it really connected with me in a really raw, authentic way - this last open studio we had, and

just talking about it with other people, it really just blew me away because I saw just so much of who I am in that painting, and it was really powerful.

MR: The next question I wanted to ask is not something people always have an answer to...but I wanted to ask anyway. What are you hoping to achieve in the next 3 to 5...oh man, this is sounds like a job interview...

AK: [Laughs] Oh no, not one of those again!

MR: No no no, this isn't that...but I mean, do you have any goals? Do you have anything you're working towards?

AK: Well there are goals I have for the next 3 to 5 years...I'd like to find a gallery, or two or three, that my work is shown in consistently. I really would like to have an exhibition or a gallery showing in another country. And if, maybe not even showing my work, but - having the opportunity to work somewhere in another country; I really like Paris a lot, it's really inspiring for me...and another goal I have is I really want to create an experiential artistic experience where I combine like my paintings, and lights, and make different rooms of experiences, and really play on the idea of being psychic creating psychic experiences with people...have them coming in there and not knowing what's going to happen, and then realizing they were being psychic throughout that. Which, for me, is probably the more far out there project...because you can set up a room, but to create that experience...

MR: Well thank you for coming out and agreeing to do this and everything. I certainly learned a lot about you and about the path of being a psychic.

AK: Yeah, and that's one of my favorite things as an artist is, I like to invite that conversation. And, you know I've...I've gone back and forth on whether I want to keep "psychic artist" attached to my name, but I think it's really important for me to keep it there, because if it wasn't for me tapping into my abilities as a psychic, I would never have started painting. I would never have started creating. So the two kind of go hand-in-hand; the more psychic I'm being in life, the more I want to create.