

rated

ART

Meet Dunce

AN ARTIST Q&A

Spring 2025

A McQueen Agency Publication

Get to Know
Esker
Foundation

10 Things
We're Looking
Forward to
This Spring

Art Fairs,
Exhibits
& More!

Get Festive
with
SkirtsAfire

MCQUEENAGENCY.com



AGENCY DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Forever Changing

This year marks 15 years since the passing of Alexander McQueen.

It's impossible not to wonder what fashion would be like today if he were still alive. His legacy is not only immense and indissoluble but something authentic, belonging to those who know how to look beyond. His work was magnificently disturbing and seductive. He sought to explore fragility, emptiness, and a perception of reality that few dare to confront. His vision was extreme, akin to the great artists of our time who inspire us in an indelible way, forever changing how we view the world.

With this issue, we celebrate game-changing artists and find inspiration in the changemakers who lead the way. We meet Calgary-based artist, Duncie, who has undergone his own transformation and exploration from street art and graffiti to his new silkscreen work that is challenging how he works and where he draws inspiration. We also highlight an incredible lineup of exhibitions from ground-breaking artists in galleries across North America.



Jared Tabler. Photo by Ryan Parker.

Inspiration is abundant in this issue, and much like the late Alexander McQueen, we push forward with vision and persistence, serving as an example of what ordinary people can do to affect extraordinary change—and inspire others.

Here's to spring and to the season of change ahead!

– Jared

ARTIST Q&A

Meet Dunce

Pop culture. It's a language we all speak in a world that divides us. A touchstone to both lean into and push back against. That creative juncture is exactly where you'll find Dunce, a Calgary-based artist who blends the visual culture of graffiti with pop art. The result? A unique style that combines street art and fine-art into one.

Though his work appears playful, Dunce often hides deeper meanings within his pieces that explore cultural topics, history, and social commentary. This year, however, that exploration has Dunce looking inward at more personal themes. A departure that has him honing his voice,



Dunce. Photo by Aous Poules.

asking hard questions, and listening to hear where they'll take him. Meet Dunce.

Tell us about your moniker, Dunce, and how it came to be.

The name "Dunce" was a graffiti tag started when I was a teenager, after I created a Banksy-inspired, five-foot-tall stencil for an art show of a kid wearing a dunce cap. The controversial piece was put on display at my high school, but then was quickly taken down because of the stir it caused among students and staff.

After that, "Dunce" became an outlet for me to poke fun at authority and to have a voice. Eventually, the name just stuck.

For anyone just discovering your art, describe your style and influences.

My style's grounded in the culture of graffiti and street art. I take the defining elements of street art (mainly spray paint, stencils, and wheatpaste) and combine them with more traditional fine-art techniques, such as acrylics, collage, and ceramics.

This started as a teenager when I would throw up stencil art wherever I could. Over the years, I've exposed myself to new mediums and techniques and am finding new ways to blend the styles together.

Did you always want to be an artist, or was it a detour on another path?

It definitely wasn't a straight line. Art was a big part of my life when I was young, but after high school I decided to take graphic design at an arts university in the UK, as a practical way to pursue art. The commercial demands of graphic design ended up crushing anything creative that I felt, and I eventually abandoned all things artistic for almost 10 years. During that time, I travelled a lot and lived abroad in London, Manchester, and Thailand and started a career in sales.

Eventually, the urge to create resurfaced, reigniting something inside of me, and now we're here.

What themes are you drawn to, and how do they represent your sensibilities and strengths as a storyteller?

I've always been drawn to pop culture and the counter-cultural voice of street art. It's anonymous and defiant, and I was drawn to that. My strongest work, however, and the pieces that stand up years later, have a deeper layer of personal meaning. And that's something you don't get a lot with street art because the personal touch is sacrificed for anonymity. I mean, it's hard to open up about yourself while sneaking around at night using a fake name. On the other hand, maybe that's the only time some people are themselves...? Regardless, this year I'm moving away from street art to focus on mixed-media, screen printing, and painting pieces to explore more personal themes that don't necessarily fit into the street-art mould.



Edson 66, aerosol and silkscreen on canvas, 47 x 58, by Duncce, 2025.

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I take the defining elements of street art and combine them with more traditional fine-art techniques.
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Top: Duncie. Photo by Aous Poules.

Bottom: Work in progress at artist's studio. Photo by Aous Poules.

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We live in a world so absorbed in itself and its divisive politics, that I want to rediscover the real human experience outside of it that connects us.

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Tell us a little more about that.

I want to tell stories from my world that exist outside of popular culture. The way I look at it, we live in a world so absorbed in itself and its divisive politics, that I want to rediscover the real human experience outside of it that connects us. We're constantly bombarded with so much information and companies battling for our attention, and the artwork we need doesn't come from that world.

Instead, I'm going to take a step back and find the stories and memories that are lost in this barrage of advertising and headlines. The ones that connect us—to each other and to who we used to be.

What's the creative process like for you? How do you develop an idea?

My creative process is a mix of two things lately:

Over the last couple of years, I've experimented with a ton of materials and processes, exploring what I want my work to look like—a lot of collage, spray paint, and ripped-down street posters... more materials and processes than I can list. I've done large-scale murals in businesses and thrown up street-art pieces



Crunch, aerosol and silkscreen on canvas, 44 x 30, by Dunce, 2025.

in the middle of the night. I've cast sculptures out of concrete and tiles out of plaster. Most recently, I've also joined a printmaking studio and have built screen-printing facilities in my workspace.

Today, however, I'm at a juncture where my biggest challenge will be honing my voice. Asking myself: *What do I really want to say? What stories need to be told?* That's the gritty work I'm doing now. Carving out the deeper narratives I want to explore moving forward.

What's one thing you're sure of? And what's something you're still learning?

The only thing I'm sure of is that I know nothing at all. And that's a lesson I'm learning again and again.

I'm also certain that art is what I need to be doing. I've done a lot of other things and was good enough at them (jobs and careers), but whether I like it or not, I'm an artist. And I'm still learning what that means and how I fit into this world.



If you could take your art in any direction and magically have the time/money required, what would you try?

Sculpture. I've made some incredible works cast from concrete, but the cost of the materials and sheer weight of the pieces became an issue. I have a series planned, and I'll find a way to bring the vision to life one day.

What do you hope people will take away from your work?

All of my best work, in some way or another, touches on the vulnerability of people. If you could take something away, it's that everyone has their own story, their own challenges, and—more likely than not—is just doing the best they can.

What's the greatest compliment someone could give you?

The greatest compliment would be for them to slow down, take a moment to experience the artwork, and find a way to experience it in person. We're so accustomed to viewing the world through screens, but nothing compares to being up close and personal. Get off your phone and visit a gallery, swing by an artist's studio, or—at the very least—watch where you're going.



“
We're so accustomed to viewing the world through screens, but nothing compares to being up close and personal.
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Photo by Aous Poules.



Tiles cast from plaster. Photo by Aous Poules.

It's a perfect day. Where do you go, and what do you do?

I think I'm living that life. I'm getting married next year, and I spend my days in the art studio with my dog, and the rest of the time renovating the house and cooking good food at home. I'm happiest when I keep busy doing meaningful work, and that's perfect for me.

If you made me leave the house though, you'd find me at my favourite pub in London.

Discover more of Dunce's work [here](#), and give him a follow on [Instagram!](#)





IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Get to Know Esker Foundation

There's no shortage of sayings about generosity. But look for proof of it in action, and those numbers dwindle. Look for it in Calgary however, and you'll find Jim and Susan Hill, founders of Esker Foundation.

Founded in May 2012, Esker was created as a welcoming space for people to not only experience contemporary art and programming—but to do so for free. As the foundation's Director and Curator, Naomi Potter, explains, that generosity is the backbone of everything they do.



Man with Vase of Tulips (crop), by Hangama Amiri. 2024.



"Jim and Susan Hill have been exceedingly generous, so as the founding director, my focus is to embed generosity deep into the fabric of this institution to create both a foundation in the institutional sense, as well as in the 'solid thing that everything rests upon' sense. It's why asking what we can do for others is often at the heart of what we do."

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Esker hosts the Project Space at street level, which aims to engage the community by increasing the presence and accessibility of contemporary art.”

And what they do is a lot. In addition to the main exhibition space on the fourth floor, Esker hosts the Project Space at street level, which aims to engage the community by increasing the presence and accessibility of contemporary art. The Project Space program invites emerging and established artists to develop new, responsive exhibitions that directly address the neighbourhood and explore contemporary issues. Exhibitions in the Project Space can be viewed day and night, seven days a week, and are on display for approximately three months, for a total of three exhibition changes a year.

As Potter explains, by working with local community groups, artists, and makers, Esker's free engagement opportunities activate their exhibitions, making them more accessible and relevant.

"Each season of exhibitions is strengthened by a series of free programs for families, youth, and adults," says Potter, adding, "The foundation understands the value of creating accessible, forward-thinking, and highly engaging public programs to gather in community, break down barriers to contemporary art practices, and support alternative methods of learning and knowing."

That emphasis on learning and knowing is reflected everywhere at Esker, starting with its name.

"Eskers are ridges made of sand and gravel, deposited thousands of years ago by glacial meltwater flowing underneath glaciers," explains Potter. "The wandering nature of these formations reminded the Hill's son, Robert, of the nonlinearity of the learning process, and that understanding, particularity of art, never happens in a straight line."

Never been? Now's the time to plan a visit. All three current exhibitions centre female experience in relation to family, gesture, and process. Hangama Amiri's exhibition, titled **PARTING/قاراف**, features intricately layered textile compositions that muse on home, kinship, and memory, as well as how gender, social norms, and larger geopolitical conflict impact the daily lives of women, both in Afghanistan and in the diaspora.

For more information on exhibits, programming, and more, visit the foundation's [website](#), and be sure to give them a follow on [Instagram!](#)



Hangama Amiri exhibition at Esker Foundation, 2025.

10 THINGS WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

This Spring



1

Mitchell Art Gallery presents:

kw7ikwłacwmíntsinlhkan | i dream of you,
through March 29, 2025. MacEwan University's
Allard Hall, Edmonton. Learn more [here](#).

2

Sopa Fine Arts presents:

***Evening the Field, featuring Shawn
Serfas and Phil Darrah,*** through April
1, 2025. Kelowna, BC. Learn more [here](#).

3

Art Gallery of Ontario presents:

***The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary
Art In the 21st Century,*** through April 6,
2025. Toronto. Learn more [here](#).

Top: *Mozart and Wielano*, oil on canvas, by Joyce Wieland, 1985. Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Hyman and Ruth Soloway, 2012. ©National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo AGO, Craig Boyko.

Bottom: *Chicago II*, oil on canvas, by Jean Paul Riopelle, 1958. Courtesy of MNBAQ, transfer in favour of a special contribution of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec (2001.154), ©Succession Jean Paul Riopelle/CARCC Ottawa 2025, Photo: Idra Labrie, Courtesy of MNBAQ.



The Broken Five, Ceramic tile, mirror tile, branded red oak flooring, vinyl, spray enamel, oil stick, black soap, and wax, by Rashid Johnson, 2019 (detail). Image courtesy the artist, ©Rashid Johnson, 2024. Photo by Martin Parsekian.

4 The Peck Visual Arts program presents: ***Protect Her Peace, featuring Charlene Johnson***, at the YWCA Edmonton, April 10 – June 27, 2025. Learn more [here](#).

5 Dreamspeakers International Film Festival, April 12 – 16, 2025, at the Metro Cinema in Edmonton's historic Garneau Theatre. Learn more [here](#).

6 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts presents: ***Joyce Wieland: Heart On***, through May 4, 2025. Learn more [here](#).

7 Royal Alberta Museum presents: ***Connections (a fusion of artistic visuals and neuroscience)***, through June 22, 2025. Edmonton. Learn more [here](#).

8 Art Institute of Chicago presents: ***Frida Kahlo's Month In Paris: A Friendship with Mary Reynolds***, March 29 – July 13, 2025. Learn more [here](#).

9 Vancouver Art Gallery presents: ***Riopelle: Crossroads In Time***, March 21 – September 1, 2025. Learn more [here](#).

10 Guggenheim Museum presents: ***Emily Carr: Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers***, April 18, 2025 – January 18, 2026. New York. Learn more [here](#).

WHAT'S ON

McQueen Artists Take Centre Stage



Top: *Guiding Lights*, bronze sculpture, 13 x 10 x 5, by Michael Abraham, 2024.
Bottom: *The Kingston Prize: Canada's Portrait Competition*. Published by Goose Lane Editions with Workbook and Donville Creative.

Spring is in the air—that magical time of year when shoes full of slush feel like love letters. Windows are rolling down, optimism's going up, and McQueen artists are emerging with new works. Here's where you'll find them.

Michael Abraham

is presenting new work at a solo show, titled *Cubism 2.0—Blockheads and Storied Volumes*, at [Visual Space Gallery](#), in Vancouver, May 7 – 11, 2025. Mark your calendars, and visit [MichaelAbraham.com](#) for exact dates and times.

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Lisa Graziotto

is honoured to be in the pages of Goose Lane Edition's newest book, *The Kingston Prize: Canada's Portrait Competition*. This beautiful, hardcover book presents over 250 extraordinary contemporary portraits by Canadian artists, celebrating the finalists and winners of the first nine editions of *The Kingston Prize*, one of the country's leading portrait competitions.

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Charlene Johnson

will be featured in a group show, titled *Protect Her Peace*, presented by The Peck Visual Arts program, April 10 – June 27, 2025, at the YWCA Edmonton. Visit [MillerArtGallery.ca](#) for updates and times.

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Pat Marino

has a year-long residence of works, on monthly rotation, at the A+ Gallery, in Ningbo, Zhejiang, China. To learn more about Pat and his work, check out his interview with *ratedART* [here!](#)



Ayita, by Teneil Whiskeyjack. SkirtsAfire 2022. Photo by Noella Steinhauer.

FÊTE

Get Festive with SkirtsAfire

Sometimes, all it takes is a spark to ignite an idea. Back in 2012, that idea was SkirtsAfire—Edmonton's first festival featuring women in the arts.

Founded by a volunteer board of artists and arts enthusiasts, SkirtsAfire is a multidisciplinary arts festival with a mission to support and feature the work of women and non-binary artists who are comfortable in a space that centres the experiences of women.

The festival's 10 days of programming runs every March, immersing its audiences in powerfully engaging performances, exhibits, and workshops in theatre, music, dance, visual arts, spoken word, and so much more.

True to its mandate, the festival's programming reflects the incredible diversity of Alberta's thriving arts community and equally diverse audience, hungry to be moved by passionate performances.



Top: Painter, Ania Telfer, creating an original piece at The A&N Experience. SkirtsAfire 2022. Photo by April MacDonald Killins.

Middle: D'orjay The Singing Shaman performing at JUNOFest. SkirtsAfire 2023. Photo by April MacDonald Killins.

Right: Stephanie Harpe, Words Unzipped: UnWoven 2018. Photo by April MacDonald Killins.

This year's lineup includes must-sees like:

- ★ The Alberta premiere of Clare Barron's ***Dance Nation***, a play about a group of pre-teen competitive dancers who fight to find themselves and be heard in a world that wants to pin them against each other.
- ★ ***emBODYment***, an array of awe-inspiring movement pieces from floor to ceiling, featuring the Flying Foxes (an Edmonton-based aerial collective celebrated for combining strength, grace, and storytelling in captivating performances) and Gillian Moon and Evelyn Joy (a duo acrobatic act performing on a single dance trapeze).
- ★ ***With Her Mother, and Her Mother's Mother***, an art exhibition by Shawnee Danielle that invites viewers to explore themes of nature, femininity, and spirituality, and to reflect on the harmony and interdependence between humanity and the Earth, urging reverence and care for our shared home.

Don't miss out! Visit **SkirtsAfire's** website for a complete list of performances and dates, and join in celebrating the work of women in the arts!

Rapid Fire

With Michael Abraham

Questions and curiosity. We're big fans of both. Fortunately, so are the amazing artists we represent. Case in point? **Michael Abraham**, who generously agreed to participate in this, our first Rapid Fire session. Here's what he had to say...

3 favourite places to travel?

Trick question? Trick answer!

1. Back East (New York City, Toronto, Montreal)
2. Europe (London, Paris, Amsterdam, Florence, Vienna)
3. And Hornby Island, BC.

First job?

Dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant in Montreal.

Last thing you watched on TV?

An overlapping stream of news and podcasts.

The thing you impulse buy most at a store?

Paintbrushes.

The person you talk to when you need a good listener?

Jpaul, Terry, or for art related things, Jared T or David Haughton.



Michael Abraham

Sweet or savory?

I enjoy multi-pleasures of gustation.

Last thing you Googled?

Gaius Cassius Longinus.

Favourite movie?

Everything Pixar.

3 things that are always in your fridge?

Oat milk, carrots, and raspberry jam.

Ice cream on pie?

An almond croissant followed by a mille-feuille!
Let's be gluttonous!

Favourite person to spoil?

My Lady!

Favourite way to relax?

It's piano, bike, and bath!

Dream vacation?

Non-stop museum days throughout Europe, with market lunches and beach days sprinkled in.

Blue or black ink?

The blackest black.

Morning person or night owl?

So night-ish that it becomes morning.

A talent/virtue you admire but don't have?

Perfect pitch, and the ability to read music (easily).

If you had to be a Disney character, which would you be?

Mickey!

What subject would you be okay NEVER learning about again?

Football? LOL.

Title of future memoir?

Eye Wonder.

Want to learn more about Michael? check out his *ratedART* cover story [here!](#)

About Michael Abraham

To Michael Abraham, art is a reflection of life, and to create it is to feel one's aliveness, insignificance, and greatness all at once. A full-time artist since 1992, Michael has developed a distinctive style that blends social commentary and "I" imagery to create figurative works not bound by realism. His motivation to create an image comes from myriad places, including art, literature, politics, philosophy, and interpersonal relationships. Each painting is a snapshot in time.

Michael has had numerous solo exhibitions, and his paintings are featured in international, corporate, private, and public collections, from London and Singapore to Philadelphia and Amsterdam. Intrigued by both the narrative and abstract nature of painting, Michael gives himself the freedom to think, probe, explore, and play—and to create the artifacts of that process.



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