

FOSTER/WHITE GALLERY

Mapping the Imagination: Chase Langford's Unique Blend of Geography and Art

ONE ELEVEN
THE SPIRIT OF THE VALLEY

Written by Miles Walls, One Eleven Staff, February 2024



A lifelong geography buff, renowned artist Chase Langford has made his childhood fascination with the world into his life's work as an artist.

His work appears in galleries from Maui to Martha's Vineyard and in private collections from Sweden to Singapore, but before his canvases make their way to the homes of Pete Sampras, Magic Johnson, and Saudi royalty, it's here in Cathedral City – in a storefront workspace, discreetly shrouded in frosted glass and all but unmarked – that Langford's works spring to life.

Many of his supersized canvases bring to mind rippling strata of sedimentary rock. Others have the swirling beauty of an agate slice, or suggest a frothy river slaloming past rocky rapids – each rendered in thick swipes of oil, full of vivid color and sinewy sensuality.

Langford's style of art he refers to as "geographic expressionism," which builds on his decades-long career as a cartographer and mapmaker, and expands it in fantastical new ways.

"I just loved maps as a kid. I was absolutely bonkers over them," Langford says. "I'd draw maps, I'd study them. But then, as I did them more and more, they morphed into being more abstract."

And as his technique evolved, over time and across iterations, his singular, abstract style emerged.

"Painting within the lines is great, but I'd rather create my own," he says. "Being a cartographer, you're representing the world, and you have to do it accurately. Where something is, is where it is, and the data is the data."



Bryce Canyon, 2021, oil, acrylic, oil pastel on canvas, 48 x 96 in. Collection of Merlin Kauffman, San Juan, Puerto Rico

But as an artist, he says, there are no boundaries, no data to honor, and nothing to communicate beyond your point of view. "You make the rules. You create a unique world in that painting. A fine abstract artist is able to be far more expressive and has free rein to create a world that they present to you, that doesn't actually exist."

Understanding Langford's background, one can trace the influences that led him to the fertile ground from which he's tilled his geographic expressionism.

Fascination with geography has been a constant in his life, from when he was a third-grade savant in Battle Creek, Michigan, wowing teachers with his catalogic knowledge of countries and continents, to the flourishing artist of today, where his abstract geographic paintings dazzle in private collections the world over.

He grew up steeped in the communicative and emotional power of visual arts. His father, Les, worked in advertising during its “Mad Men” heyday, and mom Ellie worked in fashion as a clothing buyer with frequent trips to New York City. “Both of my parents taught me that everything visually means something or can mean something, and that you have an opportunity to express something through something visual,” Langford says.



Pursuing university brought him from the Rust Belt to the Golden State, and his mapmaking career began in Los Angeles right out of college. A geography degree from UC Santa Barbara put him in line for a plum cartography position at UCLA, where he’d go on to make maps for 20 years, all the while painting in his spare time.

Working essentially two full-time jobs — as a cartographer by day, and painter at night — he’d found success as both mapmaker and artmaker, making his way into galleries throughout Los Angeles. But 2008 brought the breakout moment he’d hoped for, when his work was spotted by decision makers at Gensler, the famed architecture and design firm with offices across the globe. That moment of pure serendipity led to a high-profile exhibition of Langford’s work at Gensler’s Santa Monica office that year, and an explosion of interest in his work followed.

In 2010, he shifted his focus full-time to his art to meet the demand for it, and he’s been a full-time painter ever since. Now, there’s rarely a day in which he doesn’t paint, and even after decades of putting brush to canvas, he says he never struggles for inspiration, always finding more paintings percolating in his mind than his hands can execute.

Seeking a new, post-L.A. chapter after 35 years in the City of Angels, Langford and his husband Steve now call the Coachella Valley home.

“I love L.A., but we didn’t feel like we wanted that to be our last chapter,” he says. So in 2021, the couple traded their house in L.A. for desert digs in Rancho Mirage and studio space in Cathedral City’s Perez Art District.

Langford says they were drawn to the Palm Springs area for its small-town vibe, ease of living, and the appreciation of art and design ingrained in desert life.

“It’s vibrant and growing,” Langford says, “and it’s almost like we’re becoming a Santa Fe in a way. What I love about this region is that people take architecture and design and art very seriously. Art’s really part of the culture here.”

Story by: Miles Walls



Positano-Laut, 2017, oil on canvas, 72 x 94 in., Collection of Mayora Group, Jakarta