

Jason BOYD KINSELLA

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In Dubai*

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We live in a world defined by 'before' and 'after'. Some of the most interesting things created today come from individuals who have made the journey from the former to latter. Jason Boyd Kinsella, who splits his time between California and Norway, has made more significant transitions than most. After studying for an arts degree in Quebec, he spent 30 years in advertising. When he hit 50, three years ago, he began painting. It's not the career shifts that are most significant, it's the fact that his formative experiences are all pre-digital. His brightly coloured portraits, abstracted via their geometric elements, are super modern. Presented at ICD Brookfield Place in DIFC as part of the acclaimed gallery Perrotin's Dubai launch, they look like they are about to animate for an Instagram Reel. Superficially, they are of the moment, and could be a gateway to some obscure part of the metaverse, but they are also, crucially, analogue in nature. They belong to the 'before' as much as 'after'. Kinsella is grounded in real life experience and emotions.



“I am in love with pencil and paper,” he says, showing me around his studio in Oslo, which he has recently “puppy-proofed” to protect his canvases from his new dog Rosie, curled up beside his desk. “Sketching is the perfect conduit between the conscious and subconscious realms. I can disconnect in a way and try to capture things that are in the back of my mind. It’s a humble beginning. I do lots of sketches, then when I’ve fixed on the composition, I take a photo with my phone and put it on to the computer and play with colour to give it more life before I begin actually painting.” What begins with graphite, moves to pixels, and is finally rendered in oil. No matter how photorealistic the images seem from afar, evidence of Kinsella’s hand is always apparent in the detail. Barely perceivable imperfections create something dynamic and beautiful. The shadowing brings depth, but so do the brush marks.



Each of Kinsella's paintings take around a month to complete, because of the time needed for each layer of oil to dry before another is added. His studio has a balcony with rows of unfinished canvases facing towards a fully functioning crane left over from when the space was a ship engine factory. "I love the industrial nature of the place," he says. "And I can use the winch to get particularly heavy pieces up to the mezzanine." He is looking forward to using it to explore more three dimensional, heftier projects.

Bright Picture: Takashi Murakami's First Solo Dubai Exhibition Comes To ICD Brookfield Place

During spring of this year, the Toronto-born artist had his first solo show in France – The Impermanent State of Being – at the Perrotin Gallery, close to the Élysée Palace. For his new show, Mentalverse (at ICD Brookfield Place) Kinsella has added a new dimension to his work: He is hanging a series of canvases using his own geometric framing elements, and then installing sculptures based meticulously on each portrait, each placed in front of the painting it was taken from. All of the plinths have been sculpted by himself in typically playful geometric ways. "I wanted it to be a holistic experience. I want you to feel like you're walking into a whole environment that I've created," he explains. At the same time, he is thrilled that Perrotin Dubai is showing his work alongside a collection of hyper pop Takashi Murakami pieces: "His work is very different from mine but I also feel that there's an overlap with the universe I'm in."





Jason Boyd Kinsella's exhibition at ICD Brookfield Place to mark the launch of Perrotin Dubai.

One of the things that Kinsella and Murakami share is the way in which they take apparently living creatures and turn them into cartoon-like avatars. The Japanese artist is known for his brightly coloured smiling flower people and aliens, while Kinsella paints with a polished cubist sensibility that is as futuristic as anything by Pixar, but nods to Picasso's costumes for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in the 1920s, and the 1980s work of Jean-Paul Goude. There's also a postmodern accent to Kinsella's new sculptures, which if they were created in ceramics rather than Polystone and metal, would fit harmoniously alongside many Memphis designs, with their pink lines and blue cones.

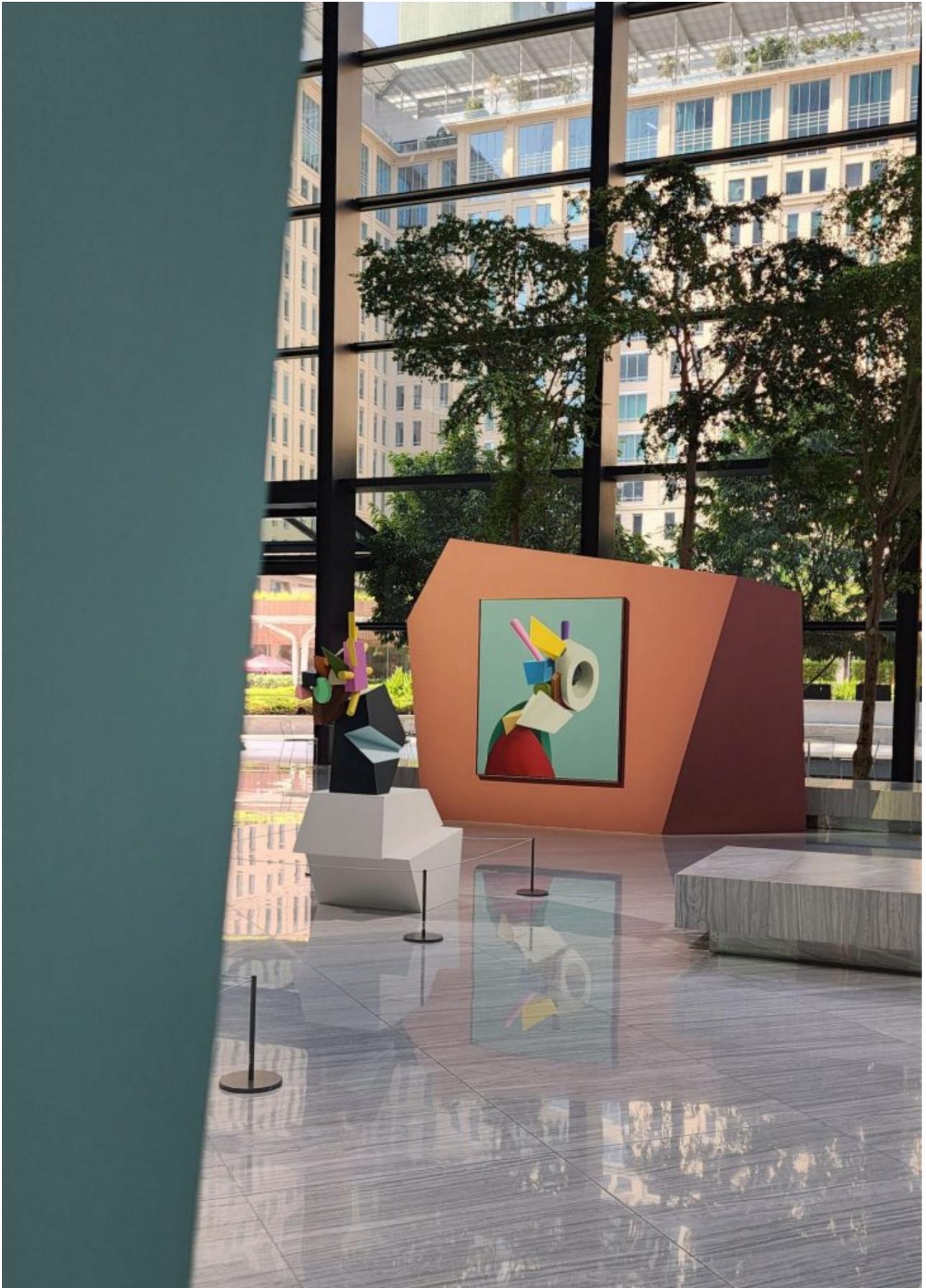
The idea of the avatar is something that drives him. Instead of working from life, he is fascinated by the results of the Myers-Briggs personality test, which breaks respondents down into 16 personality types. He creates his portraits from these results, rather than the asymmetry of someone's cheekbones or the distance between their eyes. "The idea that there are just 16 kinds of people in the world is, of course, untrue," he says. "What the test does is suggest an archetype that provides a framework, and we fill that with our own experiences, which make us modular. We all have interchangeable parts, which become like fingerprints. It's that modularity that's behind the way I create my work."



Each of his portraits is, essentially, a modular avatar. "We are all attuned to the idea of the digital icon in social media," he says. "It's how we present ourselves, consciously or not. And then people mutate themselves with face filters, and we can become abstract versions of ourselves in the digital realm. What's really interesting is that this isn't new. It goes back tens of thousands of years. I hesitate to use the term 'primitive art', but if you spend time in a museum, you'll see work that is very linear, and it's familiar in terms of what we're doing now. What we think of as hyper modern has been around for the longest time."

The portraits that Kinsella creates are rarely based on a single individual. “They aren’t meant to be a representation of flesh and bone,” he explains. “They are a projection of personality traits, and how they react with one another in terms of colour, shape, and size. I want you to get a feeling of a person and their complexity.” Given his interest in personality analysis, are there many self-portraits in his collection? Artists are, after all, committed to self-reflection. “There’s a little bit of me in every single picture I’ve made,” he says. “When you look at one of my paintings, you’re seeing a reflection of a person, but it’s also a reflection of my subconscious relating to them. So, what could be more personal?”





Jason Boyd Kinsella's exhibition at ICD Brookfield Place to mark the launch of Perrotin Dubai.

The physical presentation of the portraits is something he has obsessed about. “I am focused on scale,” he says. “I like a certain size of canvas – 120cm makes me feel that if this was a real living entity in front of me, that’s the size it would be. And in doing the sculptures to replicate the paintings, I want them the same size. I don’t want a monolith. I want something you can engage with.” He has laboured over the aforementioned plinths that support the new sculptures, but makes it clear that they are not part of the art. He was determined that they wouldn’t overpower the sculptures. They are merely, as he says, “sharing the same visual language”.

As the 21st century continues, we will inevitably lose a generation of artists who inhabited an entirely analogue age, and then embraced a digital one. Jason Boyd Kinsella is producing work that’s unique, at a unique time of his life. He understands how technology has changed our perception of the world. His portraits are the very definition of contemporary and are going to become a fascinating record of how we saw ourselves in the first half of the 21st century. They’re also strikingly beautiful, with a rich history of different influences and provenance.

Mentalverse Jason Boyd Kinsella is at Perrotin Dubai, ICD Brookfield Place, until January 28. perrotin.com; icdbrookfieldplace.com







