

CONTINUUMART

A Don Fullmer Retrospective

**Birger Sandzén
Memorial Gallery
Lindsborg, Kansas**

January 21 through April 21, 2024

I was very fortunate to first encounter the paintings of Don Fullmer as a graduate student and gallery assistant at Emporia State University in 1994. The images in his show were captivating, surreal, calming – full of Zen-like feeling. Honestly, I had never seen anything like them – original and authentic. Also, they were highly crafted with sturdy stretchers and canvas stretched with care and thought. One thing I noted in particular was his use of two D-rings on the back of each side for hanging on the wall rather than traditional wire. My first thought was that this novel idea meant I would need some hefty math and measuring to get them on the wall, but I soon discovered they had an order which made their placement straight forward and relatively simple (and they stayed level on the wall). It was the perfect solution to handle larger works and it became the exhibition that resonated most deeply with me during my time in Emporia.

After I had been at the Sandzén Gallery for a decade or so, we were able to have an exhibition of Don's paintings in 2009 and many of my earlier feelings returned. For me, his art continues to be difficult to fully describe in words, but ones that come to mind are instinctual, sublime, constructed, ethereal. All this means, quite simply, is that I really, really, like them.

Fast forward to 2024. I am so excited for the Gallery to host this retrospective of Don's work. There will be things familiar and many not so. It's been a joy and honor to work with Don – and his wife Susan. I also deeply appreciate John Eberly's help with the textual parts of this brochure and everyone who's supported Don's efforts through the years. Finally, I believe this exhibition showcases a true visionary's output and gives us a sampling by one of the finest artists Kansas and this region has ever known.

Ron Michael, Sandzén Gallery Director



*Rocket Science, 1997, mixed media,
74 x 43 inches*



Monolith, 1986, mixed media, 62 x 80 inches



Divine Intervention, 1987, mixed media, 72 x 94 inches

Hutchinson, Kansas, native Don Fullmer is a painter whose works are the creative culmination of a lifelong quest and desire for knowledge. Fullmer's education includes a 1974 BFA from the University of Kansas as well as a 1976 MA and 1977 MFA in painting from the University of Iowa. He has used this formal training as a starting point to create a long career as a working painter. He writes:

A desire to know has led to the instinct of creativity. By accumulating information from study; myths,

cosmology, religions, artifacts and cultures, a personal perception of life experience has developed. Stimulated through such perception, visual metaphors find shape, combining elements of the study evolving with the search.

After completion of graduate school at the University of Iowa, I moved back to my hometown of Hutchinson, Kansas. Feeling somewhat bombarded with information about art from my college years, I thought the relative isolation of rural Kansas would give me the opportunity to develop a more personal approach to the



Flowering Space 1, 1994, mixed media, 58 x 44 inches



Flowering Space 2, 1994, mixed media, 58 x 44 inches

Don Fullmer is the quintessence of the artist as medium, as the focal point where inner and outer converge and manifest. Like the cave painters of antiquity, he interprets a vision of reality that is personal and at the same time universal.

John Eberly



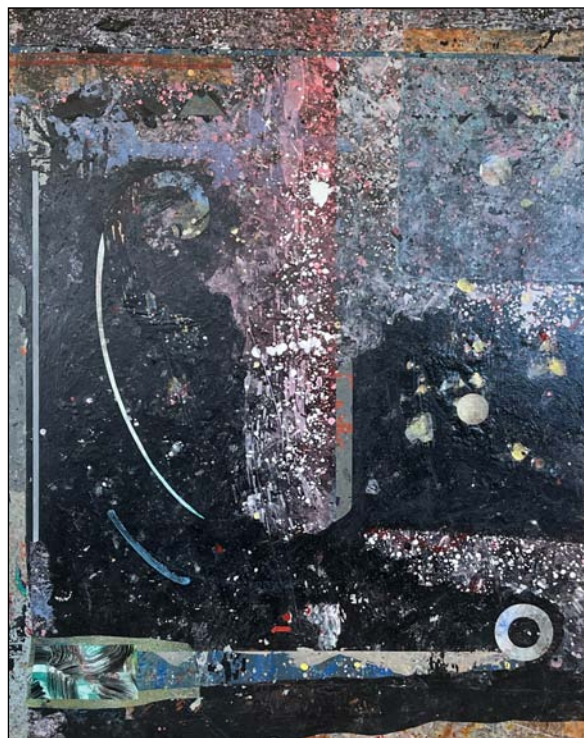
Trio, 1994, mixed media, 70 x 57 inches



Vehicle 1, 1998, mixed media,
66 x 41 inches



Spirit Vessel, 1999, mixed media,
66 x 31 inches



Star Wars, 2001, mixed media, 72 x 62 inches

content and imagery of my painting. Since 1978, I have maintained an art studio in the Hutchinson area, showing my work mainly in the central Kansas region.

Working with spontaneous forms set in structural patterns is a manner of combining "natural" imagery within an intellectual framework. Experimenting with painting processes has produced the fluid, transcendental space

with which I am now working. Recognized basic structures in these spontaneous fluid forms are emphasized and manipulated to create order and produce the content unique to that particular piece.

This spontaneity of process combined with the development of underlying patterns allows the creative spirit to produce unique new ideas and images.

You kind of develop your own language of symbols and images, and then create something that speaks to you, like visual poetry. It's more about



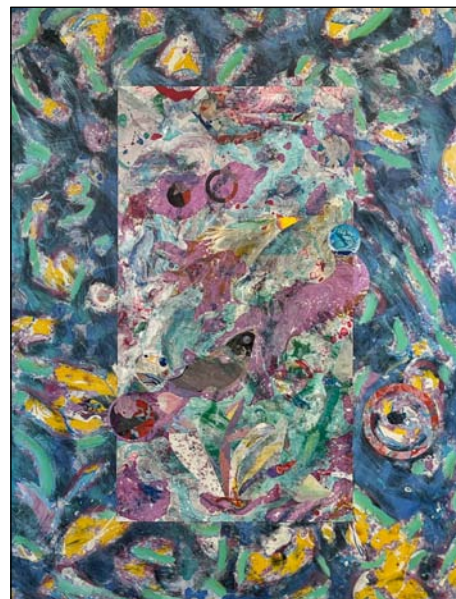
Golden Spiral, 2005, mixed media, 66 x 41 inches



Fullmer in his Hutchinson studio, 2023

Enlightened and stimulated by this perception/knowledge Don's paintings become visual metaphors offering the observer both a description of and starting point for discovery. Abstract imagery, ongoing experimentation with medium and style are trademarks of his works.

Mark Rassette



Creating Evolution, 2006, mixed media,
54 x 41 inches



Winds of Change, 2010, mixed media,
28 x 36 inches

my curiosity about the universe and cosmology than anything else, about how things are put together.



Astronomer, 2021, mixed media,
24 x 17 inches



Oumuamua, 2023, mixed media,
28 x 36 inches



Universe Dance, 2023, mixed media,
28 x 36 inches

onto canvas and used the plastic to collect excess paint, but through experimentation, he decided to paint directly on the plastic, use clear acrylic paint as glue to

transfer the paintings onto the canvas, which is then peeled off the plastic.

Transilience, a word that means “rapid change from one form to another,” features a flower in collage underneath a circular shape, rising to a T-shape at top in varying textures. Fullmer said part of the painting is made of canvas he cut from older paintings and decided to reapply.

Many of his paintings begin with a marbling process, which involves dipping a canvas into a vat of water and oil paint. *I let the process develop the painting. The water marbling makes shapes I would never come up with.* But his paintings aren’t just happy accidents. *I may have the basic idea of a painting, like it’s going to be a vertical with three windows.* After the marbling, he may embellish certain areas, delete others, or add collage pieces.

Despite the elaborate processes and technical aspects, the esoteric, and historical research, the referencing of the cosmos and astronomy, the artist himself puts it best when he simply says:

I make paintings to make paintings.

Following are excerpts from interviews with *The Hutchinson News* by Karen Gangwere and John Henderson, with Don Fullmer’s words in italics:

I’m interested in ancient cultures, stuff that goes way back. Those cultures include the Sumerian, Mayan, Inca, and Egyptian civilizations. Some paintings are reminiscent of photography from the Hubble space telescope.

Most of Fullmer’s art is done on the floor of his studio, just north of downtown Hutchinson, upon sheets of plastic. He said he originally just painted straight

“Follow your bliss.” This phrase attributed to Joseph Campbell – someone whose work Hutchinson artist Don Fullmer knows well – sums up the processes and paintings he has created over the span of a very productive lifetime.

To label his work *unique* is apt as well. There is simply nothing like it. And that is a very good thing, as he has been able not only to express himself through his art, but also to create a world – no, *worlds*, out of his imagination and skill. Even “worlds” is too small a box when discussing Don’s work – perhaps universes, Big Bangs, come closer, yet, what this artist expresses goes even farther, to a place where creation begins, finds form, and, yes, follows its own bliss.

A quiet, thoughtful, unassuming person, the outer façade of Don Fullmer belies the intellectual depths of this one-of-a-kind painter.

Devoted to his craft, his output is astounding. He has taken the chance operations of abstract expressionism and combined that with elements taken directly from Nature, and beyond, into the far reaches of outer space. His artistic vision is both microscopic and telescopic, a curious position that turns all of creation inside out.

John Eberly, Executive Director, Hutchinson Art Center



Birger Sandzén
MEMORIAL GALLERY

401 N. First Street
Lindsborg, KS 67456
www.sandzen.org



Cover image: A 1978 photograph of Don Fullmer in his first Hutchinson studio