

Visiting Artist

By Dmitry Samarov

When Megan Williamson invited me to visit her studio, I was flattered but a little confused. I've been making art for a long time but have rarely felt part of any art community. I don't deal with galleries much or have a studio in one of those rabbit-warren warehouse buildings so many artists are banished to. I don't ask for other artists' input or approval, so talking shop rarely occurs to me. After accepting her invitation, I emailed Megan back to ask what she expected of my visit.



Megan Williamson

A few months ago I reviewed [a show Megan curated](#). That's likely what put me on her radar, though we'd met years earlier. She and her husband have lived in Wicker Park since the late '80s. They've watched their street morph from gang ridden and run down to its current multimillion-dollar-home besotted yuppieville paradise incarnation. Megan proudly points out she's one of only two artists left on the block.



Mary McCarthy

Her studio is a remodeled garage in which she obviously spends a lot of her time. It feels lived-in in a way which can only be achieved by putting in the years. Zeus, her very inquisitive poodle mix, wanders in and out throughout my visit. My presence here is an unexpected treat to him and he does all he can to distract me from the art. Nevertheless, Megan shows me the circus-themed paintings she's been working on, as well as a bunch of older cityscapes done around town.

I'd been reading Jed Perl's Alexander Calder biography. In the book, Calder had just met the painter Jean Hélion in Paris in the '20s and here, in 2018, in an art studio in Chicago, was an art book opened to show a couple of Hélion's thorny, overthought canvases. Others' art is all over Williamson's workspace. She's devoted to the long

history of painting as much as she is to making her own.



Don Southard

I first met Megan sometime in the late '90s through Don Southard and Mary McCarthy. Don had been a teacher of mine at SAIC. After leaving her studio, Megan led me to the front of her house and unlocked a door below street level. It opened on a low-ceilinged finished basement she uses as a gallery/event space. Don and Mary's recent work is on the walls. This is not a commercial venture but Megan's way of giving back. She offers it to me if I need a place for a show in the future. Her idea is to just let artists do what they want with it.



Frank Spidale

The day after my visit I give a slide talk in Frank Spidale's class at Dominican University. Frank and I were in school together and he knows Megan, Don, and Mary as well. He's been inviting me to visit his art classes for years now. Just as I was confused by Megan's invitation, I was initially reticent about visiting college art classes. Because I dropped out of grad school and have never taught art in a school environment I often feel out of place in these classes, like an impostor or double agent. But after doing my spiel over and over and sometimes even getting positive feedback from the kids, I've cautiously accepted that perhaps there is some place for me in their world.

No matter how hard I've tried to stand apart from any institutional idea of painting, the ties and connections are unavoidable. Anyone involved in this racket for any length of

time will meet everyone else involved in it because there just aren't that many of us who keep going. I'm grateful to Megan and Frank and all the others who make me part of their world, even if I don't always know how to show it.

After leaving Megan's house, I round the corner onto Damen and cross Division to go to the Rainbo Club. I'll have a show of book paintings there in April and gave Megan a postcard as an invite. Maybe she'll go see it. After all, it's just around the corner.