

# HypeArt

## Mikey Yates on Painting Authentic Experiences

The Contemporary Artist Who Shines A Spotlight On His Filipino-American Identity.

Keith Estiler | June 21, 2023

Mikey Yates possesses a remarkable ability to capture the essence of intimate moments shared between family members and close friends. With each brushstroke, he invites viewers into a world where these connections become tangible, inviting us to reflect on our own experiences and relationships.

What makes Yates' work truly remarkable is his ability to infuse relatability and personal touch into his pieces, creating a serene and calming ambiance for viewers. When asked about his approach, Yates emphasizes the importance of honesty in his art. He does not seek validation in the relatability of his paintings while creating them, but rather, he embraces his own experiences and emotions, knowing that others may connect with them as well. By portraying his life with authenticity and specificity, Yates establishes a connection with the audience, allowing them to find solace, familiarity, and resonance within his work.



The exploration of Yates' artistic practice would be incomplete without acknowledging the profound influence of his upbringing as a military child and his Filipino-American heritage. These aspects of his identity seamlessly integrate into his artwork, appearing as symbols and reflections of his lived experiences. Growing up near military bases and being part of a Filipino family, Yates effortlessly incorporates these identities into his work. While they may not always be the central focus, they organically emerge as part of his narrative, much like his experiences as a child of the 90s and early 2000s, which are symbolized by references to Eastbay catalogs, Tekken, Allen Iverson jerseys, and more. These identities become integral elements of Yates' storytelling, adding layers of depth and complexity to his paintings.



Mikey Yates, *I wish it would rain*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 56 x 60 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

One cannot also overlook the strong sense of place and atmosphere that permeates Yates' paintings. His keen attention to detail when creating settings adds another layer of authenticity to his work. Whether it is a specific location imbued with personal memories or an imagined composite of various places, Yates acknowledges the significance of people's relationships with their surroundings. Drawing inspiration from his own experiences, he seamlessly weaves sensations like the humid air of a San Antonio summer or the constant drizzle of Seattle into his artwork. Additionally, Yates avidly captures textures, trees, lights, buildings, and reflections during his daily commute, using these photographs as references to construct environments within his paintings. This meticulous attention to detail ensures that his settings feel alive and relatable, further enhancing the narrative aspects of his work.



The delicate balance of color and composition is another hallmark of Yates' artistic style. Each painting becomes a puzzle where he negotiates the prioritization of elements to evoke specific emotions. Sometimes, a face may require simplification, while other times, an object may need to take center stage. Yates approaches his work intuitively, allowing for organic and surprising discoveries that would not arise from meticulous

planning. He freely wields acrylic paint on canvas, leveraging its quick-drying nature to experiment with different compositions until the harmony is achieved.

Looking ahead, Yates has a bright future awaiting him, with several exciting projects and collaborations on the horizon. Among them is his current solo exhibition at Shulamit Nazarian in Los Angeles on view through July 1. Additionally, he has a solo show scheduled at COMA Gallery in Sydney during the winter season. These forthcoming endeavors promise to be milestones in Yates' artistic journey, further showcasing his unique vision and captivating storytelling through his paintings.

Join us as we delve deeper into the artistry of Mikey Yates, exploring the intricate nuances of his work, and uncovering the stories that lie beneath the surface. Prepare to be transported into a world of intimate moments, relatable narratives, and the beauty found within the ordinary. And be sure to follow Mikey Yates on Instagram for immediate updates on his works.



**Your paintings often depict intimate moments between family and friends. What draws you to these particular scenes, and how do you choose your subjects?**

I take note whenever I have a sense of wonder towards moments in life. It could be a certain light, a memory, a gesture, a family photo etc., whatever makes me feel something. My subjects are my family and friends, or proxies of them – I think moments with family and friends mean a lot to me because I grew up with separation in my family. My paintings are really just reflections on my life thus far.



**How do you capture the relatable and personal nature of your work, and create a calming mood for your viewers?**

I think by being honest as possible in my paintings. I don't wonder if the audience will relate to a painting as I'm working on it, but I know I have a lot of similar experiences as the rest of the world. If I'm honest and specific about my life, some people might connect with it.

**Your upbringing as a military child and your Filipino-American heritage are important aspects of your identity. How do they influence your artistic practice and the themes you explore in your work?**

A lot of my identities show up in the work in one way or another – since I'm part of a Filipino family and the majority of my life growing up has been spent near military bases, symbols and aspects of these identities appear in the work naturally. Just like a part of my identity is someone who grew up in the 90's/ early 2000's, you see Eastbay catalogs in my work, Tekken, Allen Iverson Jerseys etc. These identities aren't the subject of my work but a part of my existence and appear by consequence of me telling my story through painting.



Mikey Yates, *Tekken*, 2019. Oil on canvas. 60 x 56 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

**You often capture ordinary moments and mundane activities in your paintings. How do you find interest and beauty in these scenes, and what do you hope to communicate through your work?**

I'm hoping to communicate my thoughts and feelings, my spirit. I'm not actively seeking out ordinary moments to paint, but the majority of my life experience is me doing regular things, going to work, going to school, making dinner, etc.- I think they're actually not super mundane, usually there's something more in an idea that makes me interested, a strong feeling, interesting color, or an extra-ordinary light; noticing the extraordinary in the ordinary.

**Your work has been described as “quietly powerful.” Can you talk about your artistic process and how you create an emotional impact without being overly dramatic or sentimental?**

Sometimes I think I am overly sentimental! A lot of times ideas will come to me when I'm doing something that doesn't require my full attention, like cooking a meal I've made 100 times. I'll follow that idea and I'll make a few sketchy baby thumbnail drawings and bring them to the studio where I'll further develop the drawings. Sometimes I'll do a version of the sketch in soft pastel to experiment with colors. Then I paint – I paint intuitively using the sketch as something to riff off of, not as something that needs to be copied exactly.



Mikey Yates, *So Far Away*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 60 x 40 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

**Your paintings often have a strong sense of place and atmosphere. Can you talk about how you create these settings and what role they play in your work?**

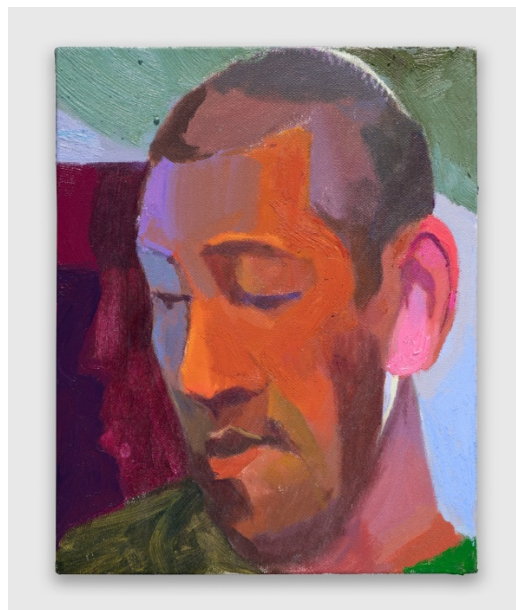
I'm interested in settings and how people relate to places. Sometimes a painting is of a specific place because it's a certain memory, sometimes the setting is an imagined composite of many places. Certain things like how humid it feels to play basketball outside in San Antonio in August, or the constant drizzle in Seattle – sensations I've experienced in places I've lived in make it into the paintings. During my commute home from the studio when my eyes feel a little more attentive, I like to take pictures on my phone of textures, trees, lights, buildings, reflections, anything that interests me. I use these photographs often when creating environments in my paintings, so in a way they relate to where I live currently as well.



Mikey Yates, *Fast Break*, 2023. Oil on linen. 40 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

**How do you approach color and composition in your work, and how do you balance these elements with the narrative aspects of your paintings?**

It's like a puzzle putting all these things together – a constant negotiation of what should be prioritized for feeling. Sometimes a face needs to be simplified, sometimes an object need to be more in focus etc. I draw pretty freely with acrylic paint on the canvas for the first few days of making a painting. It dries quickly so you can move and shift things compositionally until it feels good. It's different for each painting, but I like to work intuitively and allow for surprising things to happen that wouldn't happen if the painting was super planned out.



Mikey Yates, *Tito Jo*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 10 x 8 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

**Can you discuss any upcoming projects or collaborations you have planned for the future?**

I have a solo show at Shulamit Nazarian in LA and have a solo show at COMA Gallery in Sydney this winter.