

# Variety is the Spice of life

**T**he piercing cold of Minnesota winters is a deterrent for most. But for Richard Merchán, it was a picturesque marvel.

This type of optimism and curiosity provides an apt snapshot into Merchán, an artist and painter who hails from Venezuela and lived in Florida before journeying to Minnesota to study at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

Merchán currently resides in Greenwood, and has enjoyed a successful career in both commercial and fine arts. Yet this success would have been baffling to his younger self.

“The closest thing to a creative career in Venezuela at that time was being an architect,” he says. “There were no signs that I would pursue anything artistic.”

At age 14, Merchán moved from Venezuela to Florida; he would later reunite with family members who had previously made the journey. Though he had been drawing since he was young, he didn't fully realize his natural talents until he took an art class at his Hollywood, Fla. high school.

His penchant for the arts continued to grow as he entered a community college in Florida, studying graphic design (then known as commercial art) and learning about

illustration and advertising. The experience opened his eyes to the possibilities of a career in the arts, and he immediately began looking for art schools to attend.

Though he was accepted to several schools, the presence of seasons in Minnesota sealed the deal and Merchán was soon headed north to MCAD.

“I wanted something different from Miami—I wanted seasons and to experience the cold weather, the snow, the fall,” he says. “I didn't have seasons where I lived, and the idea of winter was amusing to me.”

Not only did the Twin Cities offer a respite from the Florida heat, but they represented a type of Americana that had long fascinated Merchán.

“I became enamored with what I saw here. This is the America I saw in the movies,” he says. “It was like Norman Rockwell, with snow and sleighs and people ice skating. But what I found here was not a bunch of farms, as people described. I found a lot of artistic energy and creative people.”

During his years studying at MCAD, Merchán continually bounced between the fine and commercial arts, taking courses in the summer that allowed him to venture into both potential career paths. Having dabbled in graphic design and advertising at a publishing company in Miami where

Meet Greenwood artist Richard Merchán.

*Written by Amy Hahn  
Photos by Rachel Nadeau*





his uncle was an editor, he took a natural next step into magazines and publishing.

Though he never stopped painting, and frequently entered the office on Monday with leftover paint in his nails, Merchán spent decades in the publishing industry. His work moved him to Miami, New York and San Francisco, sometimes leading publications, other times working on TV commercials. But the constant push and pull of painting and design continued to breathe creativity and

inspiration into both sides of Merchán's artistic life.

"It's always been a two-part influence; I brought my fine art creativity to publishing, and it allowed me to think outside of the box in a more controlled environment," he says. "Being an art director, negotiating budgets, working with illustrators and photographers helped me learn the business side of the arts. So I got much better at negotiating with galleries and collectors. I have my commercial background to thank for that."

Throughout his life and career, Merchán's philosophy evolved to deeply value the process of creating more than the output. He's continued to study the best ways to wield the variety of styles and materials at his disposal to suit the subject of a piece. While he describes his work as heavily influenced by the impressionists, he believes his tools and approach change to support the story he's trying to tell.

"I'm not hung up on looking for the next gimmick, or the next

thing to blow people away. I want to blow them away by how it was put together," he says.

The value of the process holds true for Merchán when he's working on a piece of his own inspiration or developing a commission. He's constantly on the lookout for items or scenes that spark inspiration, whether that comes from something he sees in the Lake Minnetonka area to something pulled from a magazine or, more increasingly, the Internet. He describes this process of scoping out images and ideas as



Richard Merchán Art  
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akin to collecting recipes for different dishes.

“I create a library, and then when I go into the studio I ask myself what I’m feeling like,” he says. “To me, all emotions are important. Sadness, happiness, fear, jealous—any emotion is equally important. In films, they put a soundtrack behind the images to pull at your heartstrings. When I create a painting, I want to communicate that sound.”

Merchán’s work has depicted a sweeping range of subjects, from landscapes to water to figures, and commissions are usually inspired by existing pieces.

“All of my commissions have come from something I already did that inspired the person

Merchán has a narrative in mind. But even if he has a specific story in mind, he’s not going to spoil the fun by telling others. “I always enjoy people telling me what’s going on [in a piece of art], and I never tell them what they’re looking at,” he says, laughing.

His reticence to share comes from a reverence for the ability art has to allow others to see something unique. One of his favorite pieces to hear others’ interpretation of is one of two women in a cafe in Paris.

“You can tell they’ve consumed coffee, but you don’t know if they broke up or what’s going on in the scene,” he says. “I want it to convey a relationship, but it’s so interesting to hear

Blanchard and Kelly Netishen that aims to bring a first-class experience to buying and viewing art. Both Blanchard and Netishen represent Merchán and help him find places to show his work and connect him to clients.

“We connected on social media and learned that Richard was coming to a point in his career where he wanted to focus on his art and we really clicked,” says Blanchard. “Richard is so kind and sweet and an amazing talent, so our partnership formed organically.

“With Richard, you can see the impressionistic roots of his style, but his distinctiveness comes from his use of colors,” she continues. “He can make them look easy, but it’s not easy. It’s proof of years and years of honing his craft. He’s an incredible artist and human being and really deserves to have a large platform in the art world.”

Merchán is equally appreciative of the opportunity to work with Blanchard and Netishen.

“They’re really devoted to what they’re doing, and that’s everything to me,” he says. “I wouldn’t trust my work to just anyone; the fact that I’ve partnered with them says a lot.”

As he looks to the future, it’s clear that there are many twists and turns to come in Merchán’s life as an artist, as he plans future paintings and projects. “I’m always collecting recipes,” he laughs. ◆

**“In films, they put a soundtrack behind the images to pull at your heartstrings. When I create a painting, I want to communicate that sound!”**

who commissioned me,” he says. “I understand and respect that the art people collect has to have meaning for them. When they have specific requests, I don’t see it as them controlling me as much as I see it as a collaboration. It’s OK for them to play in my sandbox and it’s more fun for them.”

No matter the subject,

what people see in the cafe.”

Merchán’s love of sharing his art with the world is clear and infectious, so it’s no surprise that he’s found a home and community in the Lake Minnetonka area. One facet of this community is his partnership with Art Girls Minneapolis, an art concierge business created by Hollie