

# Following the Signs and Symbols

Sitting down with artist, Rodney Durso

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Taking up a small, but valuable space in the West Chelsea Arts Building is one New York resident who is too curious to quit. His metamorphosis from successful creative director to abstract painter was an unexpected, but inspiring twist in his life narrative that he's equally embracing and taking in stride. Similar to his organic painting process, he's allowing life to reveal what's next, play-by-play, without the pressure of creating something forced or unnatural.

Who is he? Have you ever walked down a lovely city street, heart open, anticipating possibilities when, on the sidewalk in front of you, you're greeted with metal scaffolding and plywood walls? Imagine a world where instead of plywood, color-filled, artful pieces lined the construction area? This is just one of the ways Rodney Durso has helped to make the world a little brighter.

Founded in 2008, ArtBridge ([www.art-bridge.org](http://www.art-bridge.org)) hatched from his desire to make hard-working artists' pieces visible in a city where galleries seemed to have closed their doors to those working on the floors above. "I think it's a false idea that artists get discovered working in solitude in their studios."

As an artist himself Durso recognized that the pursuit of an artistic career is as much a commercial endeavor as it is an artistic one. Since its inception, ArtBridge has helped more than 500 emerging artists, developed a full-time staff and brought on an impressive board of directors and advisors. With projects in New York City; Kingston, New York; and L'Aquila, Italy, their upcoming project slated for the fashionable and historic Meatpacking District, will be their largest to date.

Enter Rodney Durso, painter, designer and entrepreneur. Durso's paintings surprise many, but most of all, himself. For many years, Durso ran a successful graphic design and branding agency, creating a seamless thread from the clients' thinking to final product: packaging, communications, brand and web design.

"My painting is a reaction to what was a very structured way of thinking (in graphic design), whereas painting is free."

His paintings were birthed from a desire to break apart from the constraints of timelines and budgets. Although the blank canvas is daunting, the expression materializing via time in the studio is incentive enough to continue on.

A student of art his entire life, Durso recounts the way he defied stereotypical boundaries early on. His love for music led his parents toward classical piano lessons (assuming he would profit from the experience). Durso had other plans. He grins and tells the story of being thrown out of a piano recital due to his audacious choice to wear his hair long and Grateful Dead apparel when other students were donning tuxedos.

Durso's mother had a huge role in his alignment in the arts. An art major in college and painter herself, she made certain that he was exposed to abstract expressionism as well as knew the difference between a Manet and Monet at a young age. As a teen, Rene Magritte was one of Durso's favorite artists. Architecture and jazz music were also of great interest, the latter of which continues to surround him while he paints in his studio.

Durso uses acrylic paint as his primary medium and works in collage on paper or canvas. "I think I'm little bit impatient (or a lot) and I like that acrylic dries quickly and I can paint over it right away; I can move and make changes almost as fast as I'm thinking."

**"It's like dumping all the ideas into a coffee filter  
...the drops that come out become the story"**

As most of us are used to the immediacy of using a computer, Durso relates the feeling of editing and revising to his process of layering and covering over with a fresh mark or line. A significant theme in his work are enchanting symbols, dripping in black paint or India ink. When asked if they have meaning, Durso's reply is mysterious.

"They come out of thin air...I just make them easily." More personal than brand identity or typography, these paintings relay significant meaning into the unknown of who this artist is and who he will be in the future. Most of his work is driven from a healthy dose of fear or anxiety and is a personal exploration of who he is as an artist.

"Often my pieces will end up as a few things: [nonfigurative] self-portraits, some kind of flower, robot or insect...and then there's just geometric work that's very linear...When I create a piece, the narrative reveals itself as I'm working...especially with collage. It's like dumping all the ideas into a coffee filter...the drops that come out become the story."

Where can we see his work? Durso has been shown in Alfa Art Gallery and The Brass Elephant (both in New Jersey). He also partnered with Xanda McCagg, Scotto Mycklebbust and Ian Mack to help re-launch the Highline Open Studios, giving opportunity to artists from West Chelsea to participate in the twice-yearly open-door public event.

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Durso helped to reignite this venture that has now been running well since 2007. During the event on March 9th of this year, Durso exhibited approximately thirty pieces of work as his *Signs and Symbols* 10-year retrospective.

What's next for this artist? "I know the next series, but not the next chapter... I still feel like I have ways to explore my signs and symbols. I'm also interested in three-dimensional work. I'm not sure what form that will take, but I'm attracted to outdoor sculpture. I could see myself recreating some of my symbols as a sculpture...like something you would see at Storm King or on the Park Avenue median."



It's probably a good idea to keep an eye on this artist who has transformed from graphic designer and entrepreneur into prolific painter. In the years to come, Rodney Durso will be a name you'll want to know. [rodneydurso.com](http://rodneydurso.com), [instagram: rodneydurso](https://www.instagram.com/rodneydurso)

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