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Meet CAM, the DUMBO Artist, Who Is Responsible for Some of Your Favorite Brooklyn Murals

by **Natalie Rinn**



Craig Anthony Miller, the artist known as CAM. (Photo via Joshua Reynolds)

Craig Anthony Miller, the DUMBO-based artist known as CAM, wants to help people remove obstacles from their lives—maybe a little too much. Last weekend, in the lead up to his first solo show in five years, CAM pulled a muscle in his back while helping a friend move a washing machine. In the middle of the move, he realized, it was ill-conceived. “I know, moving out a washing machine,” he lamented. “Why am I trying to save an old washing machine!” Still, he coached himself, his assistants could step in for last minute gaps before the show.

On Thursday, CAM—perhaps most recognized for his 2009 Water Street Wall that featured a large-tusked elephant—will debut all new work at the 51 Jay Street sales center, including four large paintings, two smaller ones, and “at least” four paper pieces in ink and mixed media. The show: Rituals of the Urban Yogi—which explores finding inner mastery in the context of a city—is a precursor to a much, much bigger project that CAM will begin next spring: Painting and curating 20 public walls in Brooklyn, including at least 5 to 7, says CAM, in Brownsville.



CAM and 303 Collective's Water Street wall (2009)

CAM, now 44, grew up in Wyckoff Gardens. Art had always been a part of his life. His mother would make him sign his complete name in grade school, and when he added his signature to paintings, says CAM, “going the extra mile to sign his full name,” he felt it was not working. Eventually he moved to initials and, seven or eight years ago, it finally stuck. CAM completed his BFA at St. John’s University in the late 90s and began painting in and around Alphabet City. In 2009, CAM helped create 303 Collective in DUMBO, and has been working in the neighborhood ever since.

So, why is this his first solo show in a little while? “I’ve kind of been on my own curating and painting and doing commissions and small projects for myself,” says CAM. He has also worked as a graphic designer through the years, and more recently has been busy with that. A suit that appeared in the news early this year, over a developer’s use of images from CAM’s Water Street mural in promotional material, has not yet been resolved.

Still, CAM is not anti-developer or development—he just wants his collaborations to be above the board. His show on Thursday was the result of his work at 133 Water Street, he said, where he did the window treatments; a person involved in that project connected him with the ground floor space at the 51 Jay Street development.



York Street Owls by CAM and 303 Collective artist Coby Kennedy.

All of CAM's work is about overcoming personal obstacles that keep us from excelling. The Urban Yogi may be geographically inspired, but abstractly it's a character in all of us. "The paintings are about a lot of holistic ideas, trying to inspire people to reach within themselves and achieve things," says CAM. "Yoga has always been something I've used, not in the extreme, but for all kinds of things—which is really funny because this [back] injury is pushing me back to it." Thursday's paintings include a lot of street art elements, as well as graffiti and tags in a collaboration with V-Tech Visual. "If somebody from India were doing a show about yoga, I can guarantee you the art would be different,"—still, "we may have different pastimes and different lives and talk differently but at heart we're all doing the same thing, with the goal of bettering ourselves. It's about picking yourself up, and moving to another place." (And hence you will also see his enigmatic, abstract flying birds.)

In 2013, CAM was a part of the DUMBO Walls Project—formed by the Department of Transportation, Two Tree's Management, and DUMBO BID. Next spring, his wall work continues with his "Mindful" Wall Project, in partnership with DOT, and Brownsville Partnership/Community Solutions. All 20 walls, however, will not be CAM's alone. "CAM all over the place would be overkill," he jokes. "I want to give opportunities to other artists. I'll make guest appearances, but mostly I'll be curating and picking artists I think are incredible and need to be seen." The bigger idea is to add new energy to the communities where they're located through CAM's own mantra, "Always be Mindful of your Ability to Fly." "It's a big difference when there is art in a neighborhood. A lot of it is inspiring and has an effect on the community and people when they see a vibrant and colorful message."

But first things first: On Thursday, CAM envisions a quiet re-emergence into his old world. "It's not a highly publicized event, it's really like a lot of people really close to me and other people will show up," he says. "But this is me coming back to the scene after a long time, I kinda just want to do things a little bit low key."

But there's no getting around it, this is the man who created the crazy giant elephant that all of DUMBO came to think of as its own. He's got plenty more up his sleeve.

"Next year, I'll work on something much, much, much larger, you know," he says. "Like a 20-painting show, somewhere down the line."

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