

Barkley bridges back to symbolism

By Anastasia Philopoulos

Red wings speak loudly from the canvas in a corner: 'transformation!' they shout at the viewer. But artist John Barkley is quick to add some of the more subtle truths behind his work.

"The butterfly is the symbol of transformation, but also the symbol of the divine feminine, and within Christian tradition it's the symbol of resurrection," Barkley explained. "I think the butterfly is one of the symbols that's really important because it merges a lot of different traditions together."

It's a principal weaved throughout the Chelsea artist's work; multiple yet connected meanings in one piece and many things to say to the viewer. In Barkley's humble Wakefield studio, a number of canvases display bright bursts of colour and gorgeously texturized strokes that make you feel engaged with nature. But his work simultaneously holds secrets – elusive



Chelsea artist John Barkley stands among some of the work for his upcoming show 'Bridges,' running June 4 to 17
David Irvine photo

symbols about the ways through which we connect.

The celebrated artist will hold his first show of 2015 at Galerie St-Laurent + Hill from June 4 to 17. Entitled 'Bridges', the se-

ries of paintings and drawings featured demonstrate Barkley's move back towards symbolism.

Originally a landscape painter, Barkley in the past has produced a large amount of abstract work, but recently opted towards neo-symbolism, something more symbolic in style with touches of his abstract past.

"There's a certain tension

within religion, within the world, with the environmental crisis...it just seems that maybe the content that was in my abstract work should be made more manifest, that I should pull it out more, that maybe it's time to say something a little more overtly," Barkley said.

A painter all his life, Bark-

ley, 50, fondly recalls sketching the animals on the Perth farm he lived on as a child. His father, also an artist, would bring home books on Michelangelo and Raphael for his son. Barkley moved to Farm Point a decade ago and has been producing everything from sculpture and photography to sketches and paintings since the late 1990s.

Inspired by his studies in philosophy, psychology, and religion, Barkley says his work over the years has evoked themes of spirituality, earth, and the divine feminine. This most recent show introduces symbolism or archetypes in an effort to get people thinking about their plight in the world.

"The idea is to make you think, not to give you all the questions," Barkley said. "Perhaps realize that humanity is on a continuum, that we're linked to each other. That we're not all that different [and] we have an iconic history."

The reception for 'Bridges' will run on June 4 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Galerie St-Laurent + Hill is located at 293 Dalhousie St. in Ottawa. <http://galeriestlaurentplushill.com>.