

there's this whole huge city," Matt recalled. His piece "NY Skyline from the Pulaski Bridge, LIC" best describes this newfound appreciation for Manhattan, and symbolizes his attachment to LIC. "I like to engage in my surroundings," Matt said.

Another quintessential Long Island City piece was the commissioned oil painting of the Pepsi sign through which one can see the Manhattan skyline. In characteristic form, his chiseled and textured pieces bring to life seemingly ordinary architectural aspects of the city that most New Yorkers simply take for granted. These gritty pieces breathe spirit into steel and brick, making them more than simply a backdrop to city life.

Matt's parents are both fine artists, and he described witnessing their work as a "foundation" to his own creations. Like so many great artists, Matt struggled to find his place and voice in a traditional art school environment. He spent time at Boston University, then at the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts in Connecticut.

"They did a lot of landscapes, but honestly, I was sick of landscape. It was cliché," laughed Matt, who went on to talk about discovering his passion for cities. "I thought, there's a 'wow' factor in the city," Matt explained. "I was sort of filling a gap in my own artistic training by doing it myself, by going out and drawing the city, and exploring it."

Although Matt was passionate about his art, he temporarily went into the field of graphic design. "I needed to figure out how to make a living... I worked professionally for four years. (But eventually) my artistic itch forced me to go back and do my artwork," he reminisced. Although he eventually came to the conclusion that graphic design was not for him, Matt

attributes the knowledge gained in that profession with his successful artistic career today. "All that professional training gave me the tools I needed to really be more proactive in my own art career, (to) market and price it, and work (towards) a deadline with clients whom I do commissions for."

Each of Matt's pieces is embedded with a depth of meaning that becomes apparent at first glance, and keeps you looking back to dissect the ideas and themes which lie under the surface. His *New York Series* offers an intimate look into the city, as its buildings, concrete and bridges are not mere backgrounds. Rather, they become the focus of the art itself. Brought to life in pastels on a page of one of New York's daily papers, the piece begins to develop a life of its own, becoming much more than the architecture or the newsprint. "It has to have a life of its own... I have to respond to the piece of work, as opposed (to it being a) photograph," Matt said.

Matt creates art when he is personally inspired, but he also does commissions for people who want a specific location documented in a piece of art. Matt recalled one special story in which a wife-to-be commissioned him to paint a picture of the boathouse in Central Park as her wedding gift to her future husband – as he proposed to her in that location.

Unbeknownst to her, the husband also contacted Matt, wanting to commission a painting of the same location as a special surprise for his wife. Honoring the secrets of both people, Matt described the unique process of painting the pictures under cover. "I held the secret that they were doing it for each other, and I'm the only one who knew it... I delivered it the same day to both of them," Matt recalled.



Pepsi, Oil on tempered masonite, 8"x10", 2007

The artist has a haunting painting of Long Island City chimneys that happened as a result of the boat paintings. While working on location, Matt was approached by an architect who was admiring his work. "He and his partner invited me to their rooftop," Matt said of the architect's eagerness to show him their unique chimney view.

Matt's most recognizable works, however, are his newspaper pieces where the newspaper "canvas" is more than just a background – it is in actuality part of the art. In these pieces, the date of the newspaper symbolizes the day that he started on the picture. His New York pieces, which number over forty to date, come to life on the pages of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Observer*, and the *New York Sun*. "Everything on the page is about the randomness. What is on the page, whatever is going on in my life, whatever is going on in the city. It's the merging, the forging meaning (that) is made up of the sum of these different elements, that comes together randomly," Matt explained, detailing the creative process and the meaning behind how he decides what newspaper on which to create a piece.

Matt finds inspiration for his work in cultural phenomena as unique as the newspapers he transforms into art. "There was one movie (*The Pillow Book*) that influenced me," Matt recalled. The film prominently featured tattooed bodies, which was the concept of beauty that in some ways inspired Matt's newspaper art. When looking at the bodies covered in tattoos, Matt thought about "how beautifully these two things went together" and about how the "theme of putting two things together that don't really belong together (can) create a whole other statement." Expanding upon the idea of putting things that don't belong together in an effort to create art, Matt described the theoretical underpinnings of his work. "In a nutshell, there is basically the theme of reconciling opposites (...) how things that don't belong together, when they are put together – one and one can equal three when the sum of the two add up to more than them." There is something truly magical about his beautiful art coming to life upon the pages of newspapers we are used to seeing abandoned in the subways. Through his work you can see words and phrases coming through the pastel, sometimes random, sometimes intentional, which adds to the character and meaning of Matt's work.

Originals of both his oil paintings and pastels are available for purchase from his web site, www.tommatt.com. His web site also includes contact information, should you be interested in commissioning him to create an oil or pastel rendition of your favorite part of the city. Because of the nature of his newspaper canvas, he has begun producing high quality archival prints of the pastels on newspaper, which will hold up over time in ways newspaper will not. It is impossible to fully appreciate Matt's incredible work without seeing it in person. He has regular showings around the city, and recently had a Long Island City local showing at Tour-nesol (50-12 Vernon Boulevard in Long Island City) from February 8 to April 8, 2008.



The Exchange from Beaver & Broad St., Pastel on newspaper, 14.75"x22.5", 2001