Susan Hobbs

Malik McKoy

1995   born in Surrey, BC
2020   B.F.A. Drawing and Painting, Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto
2020   Post Graduate Certificate, Game Art and Animation, Seneca College, Toronto

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2023   *The Botanist*, Trinity Square Video, Toronto
2022   *Code Switch,* The Rober McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa
2020   *the winter that persists,* Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto

Selected Group Exhibitions

2022   *Lose Your Illusion,* Ignite Gallery, Toronto
2021   *What We Are Missing,* InterAccess for BigArtTO, Toronto
              Sensing Nature, Momenta Biennale de l'image, Montreal

Public Commissions

2023   *They Matter*, Chestnut Hill Developments Recreation Complex, Pickering
2022   *Sunset Drive,* Assembly Park in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Vaughan
              The Fourth Wall, Nuit Blanche, The Drake Hotel, Toronto

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

Code Switch
June 18th, 2022 – July 31st, 2022

Artist Residency
Curator: Hannah Keating
Artists: Malik McKoy

Malik McKoy, DefaultSkin, oil on canvas, 2022

In virtual spaces, expressions of identity are usually performed through avatars. Malik McKoy's new body of work asks how these carefully mediated and constructed identities actually relate to the people they represent when they are used to connect or perform moral virtue. As an abstract self-portrait, *Code Switch* also considers how technologies like virtual reality and artificial intelligence reproduce human biases, and more specifically, how racialized bodies are subject to the harms caused by online escapism and the commodification of identity.

The exhibition features five new paintings and an augmented reality installation created during McKoy's residency in the RBC Artist Incubator Lab. A central character appears in all six works. His shifting form and surroundings are composed of the disassembled pieces of a 3D human figure; as 2D shapes, they are unrecognizable as the basic figure McKoy built using 3D modelling software. The avatar stands in for the artist, travelling through abstract and fantastical spaces, which relate in some way to McKoy's own online identity and the collective experience of disorientation that virtual spaces can produce.

The internet offers users the freedom to grow beyond their physical environment and try on new identities – it is also prone to prejudice, exploitation, and misinformation, when truth or identity can appear transparent one moment and opaque the next. McKoy is interested in exploring how Black and queer bodies in particular are fetishized and consumed as cultural currency. For instance, in *DBLRM (Do Black Lives Really Matter)*, he adopts a cynical view of public promises for representation, inclusivity, and justice by highlighting the fragile balance between utopia and horror in virtual fantasies. As playful as it is discerning, *Code Switch* reflects McKoy's ongoing effort to bridge his digital and paint-based practices and to grapple with the increasingly blurred line between online and offline selves.

PR JECT
REFRAMED

Malik Mckoy

Describe the type of work you make and what motivates you.

Between both my digital and analog practice, my work can be described as vibrant, playful and expressive. What motivates me to make work in this style is a sense of escapism from the mundane nature of everyday life - not only for me, but for the viewer as well. I generally aim to inspire feelings of joy or nostalgia through the work's formal elements, even if the subject matter originates from opposing emotions.

Can you tell me about your early days of art-making? Were you creative as a kid?

I feel like I've always been really creative, ever since elementary school, I would love art class, that would be my favourite subject, and even if the project was super basic, like the colour wheel, I would just be so excited about it, like "Oh my God, complimentary colours, wow!"

Do you remember anything that you were drawn to in particular?

I feel like in school I was always just up for anything, but at home, I was obsessed with cartoons. We had Cartoon Network and that was like, my goldmine. I'd watch *The Power Puff Girls, Dexter's Laboratory, Codename: Kids Next Door,* all those good shows, and I'd try to copy the styles, and make fan art and fan fictions and all that stuff. I had my own TV in my room, it was one of those small like, box TV's you got at Walmart, and I would just watch whatever I wanted when I got home from school, and I'd be drawing on the side, too. *So I feel like that's what I was drawn to most—drawing and storytelling.*

How about later on, how was your time at OCAD? Did you know you were going to go to an arts university?

Well, I started out on a different path. Originally, I'd wanted to go to OCAD or an arts school, but my parents were encouraging me to do something else, because you know... being in the arts is not necessarily "stable". So, I ended up actually going into architecture at Ryerson, and yeah, I didn't even last a full year. It was so intense, like academically, and I didn't take a break after high school, and I just felt burnt out because I'd worked so hard in highschool to get really good grades in order to get into this program, and when I got there, it just wasn't what I thought it would be. It was a lot

more academic rather than creative. There was some creativity, but I felt like a lot of it was hindered by how structured it was, which I really didn't like, so I dropped it.

Were you happier at OCAD? What did your time there look like?

The first few years were kind of tough, not going to lie. I think I was just – I wasn't paying attention to my mental state, and it was kind of taking a toll through out my time in university and I just wasn't acknowledging it, or like I didn't know what was happening. So that really affected my time at OCAD. But I felt like what I gained from my time there was beneficial. *I was able to develop a style that's really my own, and a practice that's my own, I don't know, I'm just very comfortable in my artistry now.*

Can you describe your painting process a bit? What goes into making a finished piece?

First, I usually lay down a base coat with spray paint or thinned oil paint to achieve a hazy first layer. From there, I either sketch out a composition I've already made in my sketchbook, or I use a more freestyle approach. Recently, for my first solo residency at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, I used digital processes as a point of origin for my paintings. I deconstructed 3D models of human-like figures and collaged the resulting shapes together to form compositions. The colours used in my compositions aren't thought out beforehand, I decide on them as I progress through the painting. When I know a painting is finished, it's just a feeling as opposed to a percentage of completion or a standard to meet.

When did your drawing and painting turn to you starting to work digitally?

I'd say around my second year at OCAD. I don't know, I was always like playing around on the computer, ever since high school, like with Tumblr, but it was very basic, like making gifs on Photoshop and stuff. And then I would take it to the next level by like making my own handmade animations, around like 2016. I would just make animations frame by frame and then scan them into my photoshop, and then digitally colour them, and throw some music on top. It would take days, but like, I was so into it. And I don't know where the shift came from. I think once I started learning about Cinema 4D I was like, "Oh, this is the wave". And then I started to fuse drawn animations with like 3D shapes and stuff, and it just wasn't really blending seamlessly, so then I kind of just transitioned right into 3D. But I still like to incorporate hand drawn elements into my work sometimes, for textures and embossing…
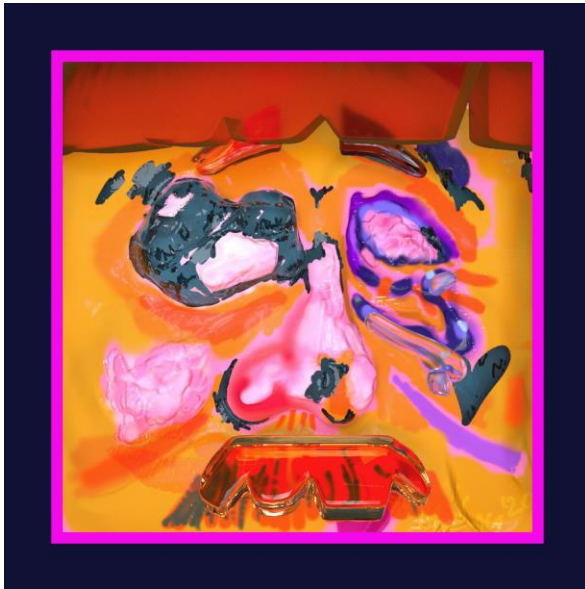
"Take opportunities to not only work on your practice, but to plan and research different pathways."

Can you explain that process a little bit?

You know how in Photoshop you can like emboss things, to make things look like they're engraved in something? With the 3D stuff, you have something called texture maps, so the normal texture map applies either raised or recessed textures, so I would use—like in my latest piece at the Xpace exhibition—I used notes from my journal, scanned them onto my computer, and then converted that into a normal map, so that it could create a raised texture on a flat surface, and then applied a gloss over it so you could see the light reflecting off the raised texture of my notes.

That's so cool.

Yeah it's really cool, the more you learn about processes like that you're like "Oh, I can totally elevate my art to the next level with this cool little trick". And usually like normal maps are used to achieve a really realistic kind of texture, but I kind of use it for the opposite, I use it for like abstract, like very weird things.

Are there any artists that you'd say are influential to your style?

Toname a few: Boldtron(@boldtron), Devan Shimoyama (@devanshimoyama), Jonathan Lyndon-Chase (@jonathanlyndonchase), Tahnee Lonsdale(@tahneelonsdale), Super Future Kid (@superfuturekid).

What do you do when you're not making art?

When I'm not making art, I'm usually watching a series, listening to music, or reading. These days I've been watching Girlfriends, as well as listening to the Sibling Rivalry podcast and digging through their catalog of recordings. In terms of music, I've been loving albums from Kehlani, Mahalia, Victoria Monet, and Tinashe. Aside from that, I've recently decided to learn how to code to expand my skill-set.
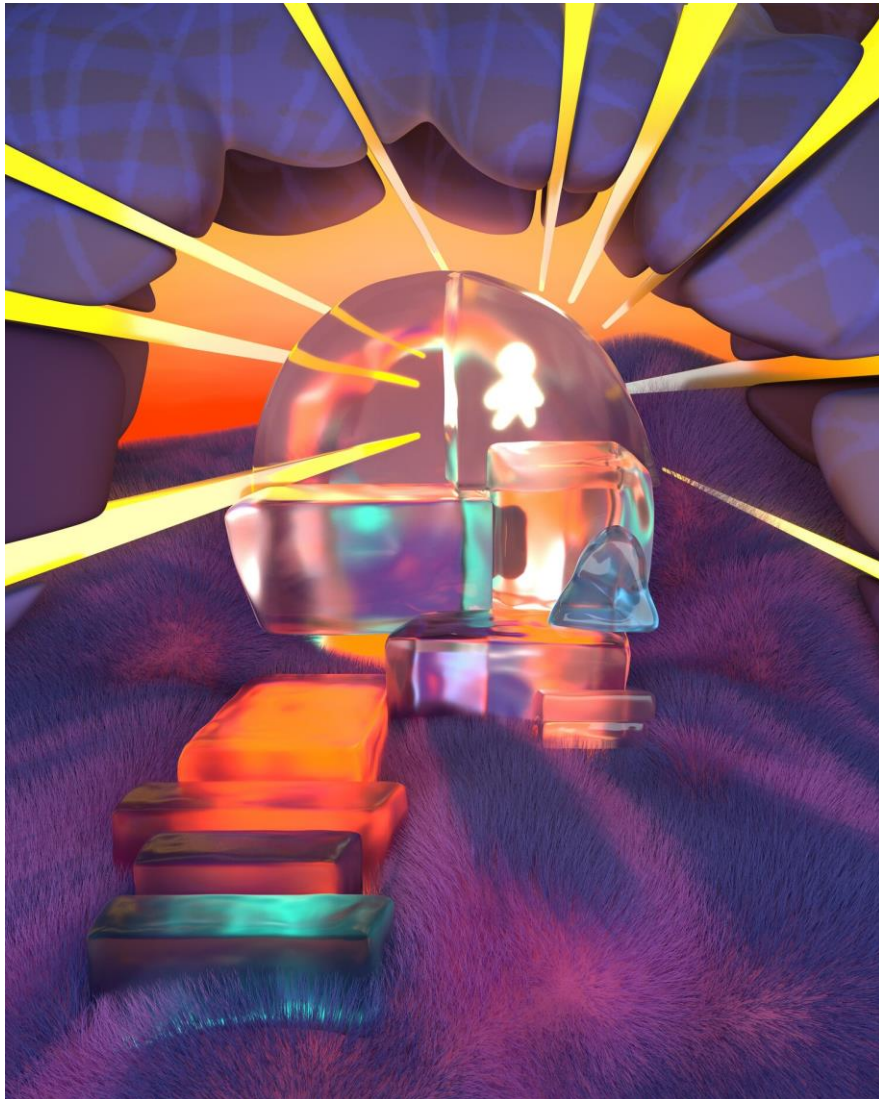
How is learning to code?

I'm doing it very much at my own pace, it's not like I'm enrolled in anything, so whenever I can or whenever I feel like it, I just hop on a website and do a couple of lessons. I like it, it's very cool. It actually makes me feel like…it's what Tumblr me thought I was doing.

That's cool. So after OCAD, you went to Seneca?

Yeah, for Game Art and Animation... It was jam-packed. At the beginning I was really liking it, but then Covid hit, and as the months progressed, I was slowly losing my excitement, just because the amount of work we were doing was a lot, we had a lot of projects to do, a lot of modules, a lot of deadlines to meet,and they weren't easy. It was like high technical, industry-standard stuff. And, as I mentioned before I don't really like structure, but I will say, I did gain a lot of skills from that program that I can use toward my art practice, which I'm proud of and grateful for.

What's something that you learned that you use now?

I guess the way I approach building models has changed a lot. It's a lot more optimized, a lot more clean. Because before I was just doing anything, and it wasn't necessarily the smartest way to approach my work and achieve what I wanted. So the workflows that I learned in that program helped me a lot and saved a lot of time. And the texture maps and the normal maps that I was telling you about, that's been really helpful and influential in my painting practice lately. I've been experimenting with a lot of that, like texture mapping, compositing, playing around with game engines, seeing what I can do with that to make interactive stuff that I can put online. Yeah, it just opened an avenue which I'm excited about. There are lots of little pockets I want to explore. I keep picking up skills, like coding, the gaming aspect, and many other technical skills, so, we'll see...

Any words of advice for artists that might be just starting out?

I encourage any emerging artist to put their work on social media as much as possible. Visibility on social media is more important than ever now. Make sure it's a mix of process work and work that you're really proud of. In my opinion, it's attractive when an artist's page is curated with intent. Invest energy into your brand, because others will believe in it if you do. But also, take opportunities to not only work on your practice, but to plan and research different pathways. I say that because are so many possibilities

that we may be unaware of and it's important to be able to adapt. Think of your time researching as your in cubation period.

SPARK
BUSINESS & INNOVATION MAGAZINE

Malik McKoy

The Ajax artist tells us about his latest art, where his inspiration comes from and more...

Ajax, Ont.-based multimedia artist Malik McKoy is an up-and-comer in Canada's art scene. Not only did the painter and digital artist recently graduate from OCAD University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the prestigious school's Drawing and Painting program, but he also graduated from Seneca College's Art and Animation program. "Straddling the line between analog and digital, McKoy attempts to create a visual world that lives across both practices," says his website, malikmckoy.com. He has an eclectic portfolio that features plenty of colour and texture, and he points to Devan Shimoyama, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Boldtron and Tahnee Lonsdale as fellow artists he's paying close attention to. So far this year, McKoy has shown in two exhibitions: One concluding a solo residency at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa and a group exhibition at Toronto's Ignite Gallery.

Susan Hobbs Gallery

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Most admired artist?
Devan Shimoyama. I like how he defies expectations of what art from a Black artist should be, but also how he approaches his multimedia works.

Preferred medium?
Painting and digital 3D modelling.

Monet or Da Vinci?
Monet.

Picasso or Van Gogh?
Picasso.

Your work in three words?
Vibrant, playful and sinister.

Favourite fall tradition?
Observing the changes in the leaves and the arrival of morning fog.

Currently on your playlist?
Apink Chobom by Copycat.

Currently binge-watching?
I'm blazing through the newest seasons of "Tuca & Bertie."

What's inspiring you today?
How we curate our real-life personas versus our internet personas.

Favourite restaurant?
Phomono Vietnamese Cuisine in Ajax.

Your proudest moment?
Having a solo exhibition in an art gallery for the first time.

Something on your bucket list?
Skydiving or maybe hot-air ballooning.

Who do you look up to?
My mother.

Favourite outdoor
activity in the region?
Walking on trails or along the waterfront.

How do you spend a day off?
At home listening to music or watching YouTube.

Favourite memory?
Vacations in Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

LONG WINTER

# Malik McKoy: from architecture dropout to city builder

October 20, 2022/ Tom Beedham

Malik McKoy is building a city, but he's still reinforcing his foundations.

A multimedia artist with a penchant for colliding the surreal and mundane, McKoy's original career path had him enrolled at Toronto Metropolitan University (then Ryerson) to study architecture, but he soon found his program's emphasis on codes and standards stifling and promptly dropped out.

Registering at OCAD shortly afterward, McKoy picked up a bachelor of fine arts in drawing and painting instead, topping off his formal education with a postgraduate certificate in game art and animation from Seneca College.
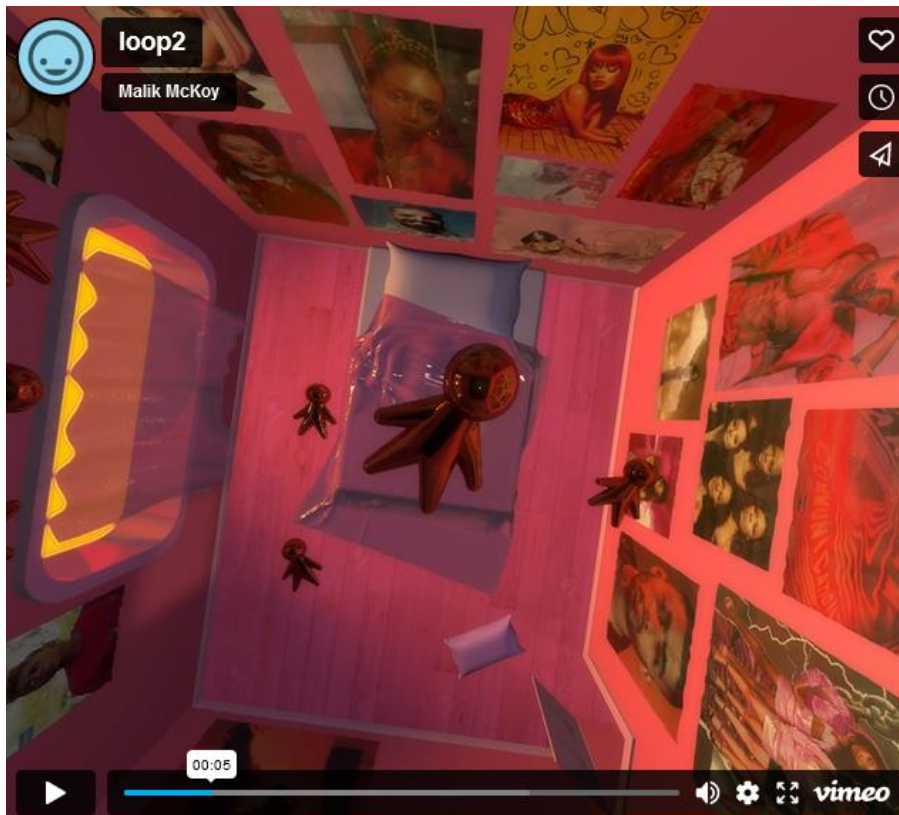
But McKoy's not done with architecture just yet. The latest addition to his portfolio — a hyper-lively investigation into the minutiae everyday life that pulls viewers in with vibrant colours, abstract figures, rounded forms, plushy attributes, and plastic toy-like textures and shapes while the same exaggerated features expose their sinister underlying realities — has him constructing an augmented reality cityscape for Hypercity, launching next month with the beginning of Long Winter's 2022/2023 season.

Claustrophobically crowding the viewer's phone screen with an omnidirectional field of skyscrapers, the project, *First and Last*, is a response to the city's housing landscape, but McKoy says it's also distinctly personal.

Living an hour east of Toronto in Pickering, McKoy has been travelling downtown for school for years, but rising rents have locked him out of living there, rapid development adding insult to injury.

"As someone trying to move to the city myself, I just find it more and more difficult as the years go by, with the increasing rent, and I was really thinking about who can even access these spaces, old or new?" he complains. "The rent's just sky high and there's no room for upward mobility. So with that in mind I'm basically trying to create an AR piece that simulates that feeling, having highrise buildings that recede into the distance from all sides of the screen so it kind of frames the real-life environment.
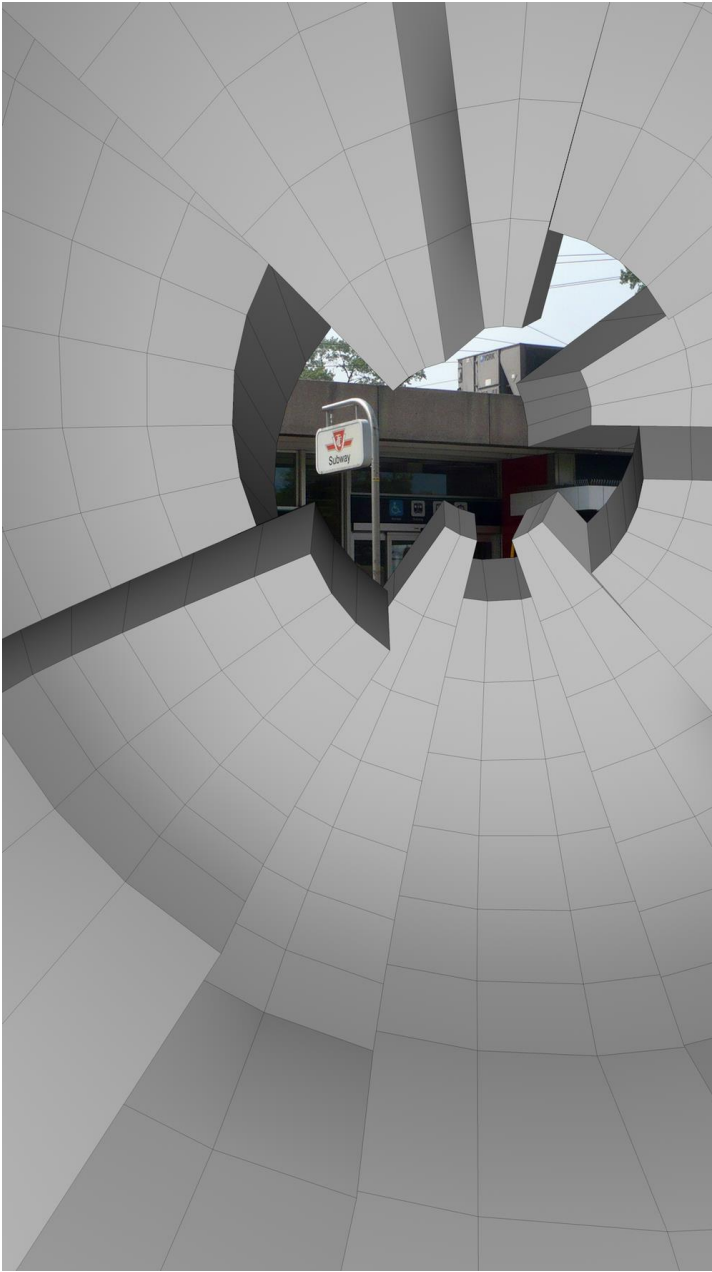
'First And Last' Concept art (Courtesy Malik McKoy).

"It's sort of like a one-point perspective in a way," he continues about the AR experience. "The highrise buildings are rising towards the centrepoint of the screen while leaving a hole open for the real life environment. And then on these highrise buildings will be windows — or you can call them screens — that will basically take the camera feed of the real life environment and distort them and have effects over top of them to distort what you're looking at."

Like the market often does, the application will restrict the viewer's access to the windowshopping experience.

"You can see what's in front of you through the screen, but you can't access it through all the distortions and glitches," he says. As Hypercity approaches, he's also toying with programming different animations to cycle through the windows as viewers tap their touchscreens, building in transience and ephemerality to the hostile architecture.

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More cyber-expressionist than photoreal, McKoy says his work typically stems from feeling, treating his art "like a visual diary" rather than grounding it in research or critical traditions.

"It's very self-referential in that way, where I refer to how I navigate suburban spaces as a Black queer man. So that comes up often, but it's sort of unconscious."

McKoy similarly found himself bucking against the technical emphasis in his schooling, preferring to explore technologies that allowed him to free up his expression rather than bog them down in procedure. Following his disdain for architecture school's emphasis on formal routine, he found himself escaping the colder sections of his painting program drawing animations in Photoshop. Going a step further, he says a 3D modeling elective that was licensing the animation and rendering software Cinema 4D was the key that opened a world of abstract expression for him, abandoning anatomical references to indulge his animation.

la grande odalisque, 2021
Malik McKoy
04:00

"It sort of allowed me to be free and just think of ways of drawing that I hadn't done before," he says about Cinema 4D. "I just allowed myself to play around and [indulge my] creativity and be openminded to imperfections."

McKoy's efforts to separate himself from strict regimen and tedium are perhaps what make his obsession with the mundane the most intriguing: *la grande odalisque*, a 2021 digital sculpture, explores the grotesque lengths people go to represent themselves online daily, a figure contorting themself under a set of ring lights; in *Code Switch*, a series he developed for a solo residency with Oshawa's Robert McLaughlin Gallery this year, bodies are oversized, wrapping themselves around their property, even detached from themselves in bizarre amputations.

"My everyday life in Ajax and Pickering is not exciting, so really it's just me trying to be real and talk about what my genuine experience is on this planet but glamourise it and package it in a way that's interesting to the viewer, with bright colours and twisted forms."

"NumberNounDrive," oil on canvas, 2022. Part of McKoy's 'Code Switch' series created in residence at Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

There's tremendous range from one piece to the next, but McKoy insists it comes from the same place.

"I'm still just tapping into that same process."

It's all emanating from a centre of intimacy and self-reference, but McKoy doesn't feel boxed in. Working across mediums, new skills gained in one area are reflected in another, continuously adding to his toolkit, building outward. After a few experiments with AR, eventually he'd like to try his hand at VR, creating expansive environments audiences can immerse themselves in.

"When you're working on these 3D images, there's so much depth in the software that people don't see through a flat image. So I want the user to revolve around the work and and walk around, find themselves in a whole world built on just my work. It's just a lot of HTML and coding I have to learn. But it's on the list."

Malik McKoy's *First and Last* is a part of Long Winter's [Hypercity](#) programming, running November 2022 through March 2023. McKoy will also discuss *First and Last* in a virtual artist talk taking place 7-8 PM EST on November 24 ([register here](#)).