Tokyo Gendai

John Joseph Mitchell: “The pleasure of making is very different from the pleasure of viewing – and yet, for me, one depends on the other”

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Based in a 200-year-old house near the Tuckahoe River on the east coast of the US, John Joseph Mitchell draws daily inspiration from the marshes, farms, waterways, and rural architecture that surrounds him.

Mitchell will present work with Ingleby Gallery at Tokyo Gendai this September. In this interview, he shares his daily rhythm, reflects on the influence of Japanese printmaking, and speaks about the joy of painting every day.

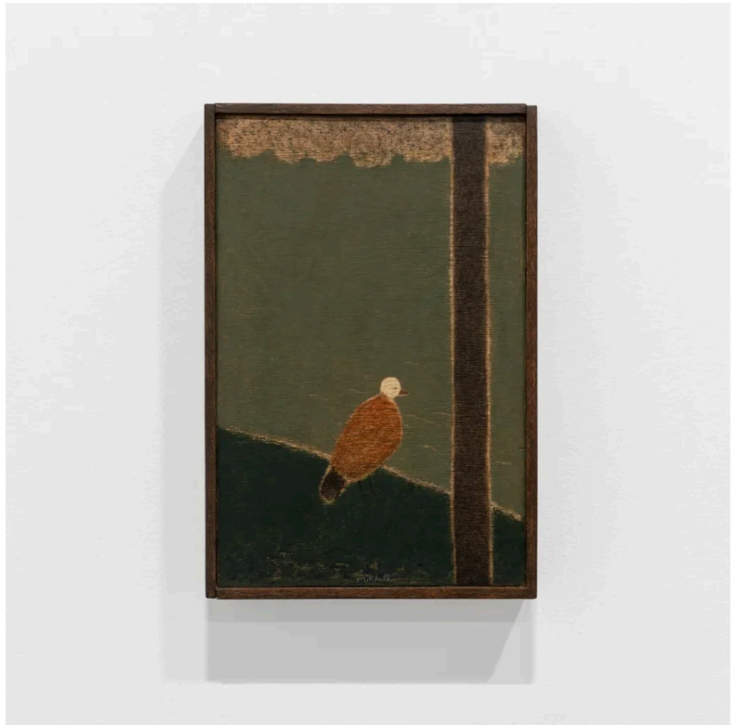
“Creating harmony out of the tension between the object and the image – the surface and the space – is, for me, the ultimate goal. Harunobu, Hiroshige, and Hokusai were masters of it.”

What does a typical working day look like at your 200-year-old house near the Tuckahoe River?

I get to work early most mornings, painting or drawing in the old parlour of the house, which serves as my studio. After lunch, if I’m up for it, I keep painting, making prints, or working on panels upstairs in another studio. Otherwise I go out looking for things to paint. I live in a small town by the Atlantic Ocean, surrounded by other small towns, all filled with old houses. In between are marshes, woods, farms and rivers. These are the places I’ve come to know visually over the course of my life. Exploring them and painting them brings me great joy.



John Joseph Mitchell, Coots before a storm, 2025. Courtesy of the Artist and Ingleby, Edinburgh



John Joseph Mitchell, Gadwall Beside a Pond, 2024. Courtesy of the Artist and Ingleby, Edinburgh Photograph by Michael Lopez

What are you currently working on there?

I just finished making a unique book of monotypes. A friend of mine who’s a bookbinder created a beautiful book for me to paste the monotypes into. It’s covered in grey linen and yellow parchment with a matching slipcase. The process mirrors the way I make paintings – beginning with a framed panel, then building the image from there. I’ve been playing with the idea of making a book for a while, so it was exciting to finally put it together. It’ll be part of my show with Philip Martin Gallery this summer, and I hope to make more like it.

Your paintings capture fleeting moments and everyday details. Why are these small, intimate glimpses so meaningful to you?

I want to paint every day. And I want to be inspired every day to explore whatever formal ideas I might have at the time. So it feels natural to turn to those small, fleeting moments that are always there.

You’ve mentioned being inspired by Japanese printmaking. What is it about this craft that draws you in?

At the risk of generalising, Japanese woodcuts of the late Edo period fascinate me. They seem to be made with equal care for depicting a scene and creating a formal design. That balance is something I admire across all the artists I love. Creating harmony out of the tension between the object and the image – the surface and the space – is, for me, the ultimate goal. Harunobu, Hiroshige, and Hokusai were masters of it.

You often make small works in series. What draws you to this approach?

Because my paintings are generally small, it suits me to work on many at a time. I don’t set out to make them in a series, but since I work in batches, they naturally end up sharing things – colour palettes, motifs, or moods.

What’s more important to you – the process or the final result?

It’s difficult to separate the two. I love pictures and looking at them, so I make paintings I want to see and hang on my own wall. But the pleasure of making is very different from the pleasure of viewing – and yet, for me, one depends on the other.

<Thank you very much! We look forward to seeing your work in September.>