ELLE DECOR

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art show

Clockwise from far left: The artist in front of *Couple*, 1997–200[ ] *Broom Painting*, 2007. *Glitter Pain[ ]ing*, 2007. *Seven Pointed Star*, 200[ ]

Chris Martin

With simple shapes and bold colors, this Brooklyn painter embraces the metaphysical

By Anthony Barzilay Freund

During a recent New York City subway ride, painter Chris Martin noticed an advertisement in Spanish for a local dentist. "It read, CUARENTA AÑOS DE EXPERIENCIA—40 years of experience—and this bulb lit up in my head," Martin recounts, laughing. "I've been at this since I was a teenager so *I've* got 40 years of experience, and I'm still fumbling around." The anecdote is not merely self-deprecating. Martin, who is only now achieving the kind of following that art-world insiders have long felt he deserves, is animated by a genuine belief that he's still got much to learn about his chosen craft.

Based in Brooklyn and the Catskills town of Walton, New York, Martin explores themes such as mysticism and psychedelia in colorful, large-scale abstract canvases that are often heavily collaged—he's been known to use glitter, feathers, old dog blankets, James Brown records, and even bread. The patterns can be deceptively simple: undulating vertical columns, homespun stars, and organic blobs evoke at once landscape painting and American folk and Outsider art.

"Chris uses this naive vocabulary that's backed up by sophistication," explains Los Angeles–based filmmaker Martin Brest (*Scent of a Woman; Beverly Hills Cop*), a collector of his work. "He's an intellectual but not cynically appropriating 'primitive' motifs." Sarah Newman, a curator at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., who is planning a Martin show for 2011, agrees: "The images are quite canny the more you delve into them. But they're also accessible and sensual," she says.

Until 2004, Martin supported himself as an art therapist for AIDS patients and recovering addicts. Still, he painted every day. "The discipline is going into the studio and moving materials around," he says. "Then I back off, suspend critical judgment, and just let things happen." ∎

Classification of African Masks, 2004–07. See Resources.