Kai “Raws” Imhof
an abstract aesthetic of complexity



Between order and chaos, harmony and disruption, Raws’s works reflect a world whose complexity he neither seeks to simplify nor whose contradictions he tries to resolve.

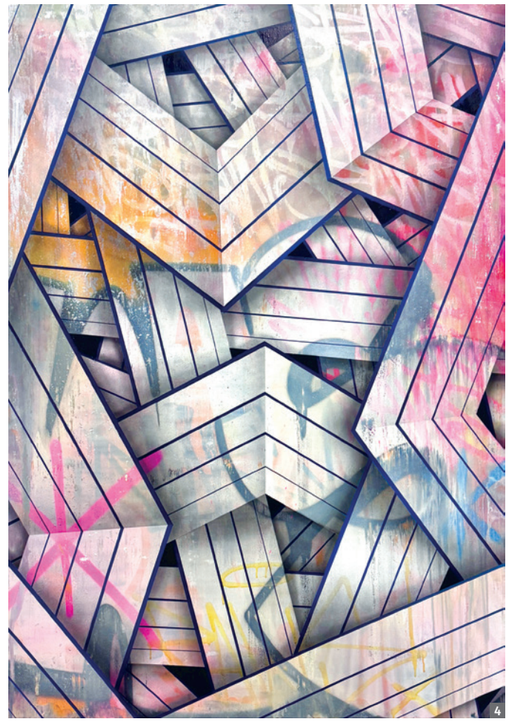
By Gabrielle Gauthier

The letters have disappeared, but graffiti remains. In Kai “Raws” Imhof’s paintings, it survives through rhythm, gesture, energy and his distinctive way of occupying space. As the letters gradually faded away, the line took center stage, becoming the driving force behind his compositions. It crosses the surface, organizes perspectives, creates volumes and connects planes with meticulous precision… Color, equally essential, determines the atmosphere, accentuates contrasts and plays a fundamental role in the overall balance. Yet the artist deliberately chooses to disrupt this rigor: rawer gestures, organic materials and even chance occurrences disturb the precision of the composition, introducing an element of instability. This interplay of opposites goes beyond purely formal considerations: it expresses a vision of a complex and uncertain world, based on the coexistence of opposing states where order and chaos, harmony and tension… exist simultaneously. It is within this space between extremes that Raws situates his work, allowing abstraction the freedom to raise questions without imposing answers.

You come from a graffiti background and have gradually moved away from it in terms of form. What aspects of your current work remain deeply connected to lettering?
Although the letters have largely disappeared, lettering remains







1. Kai “Raws” Imhof.

2. *Colors*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.

3. *Sans titre*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 60 x 80 cm.

4. *Past and Present*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 150 x 100 cm.

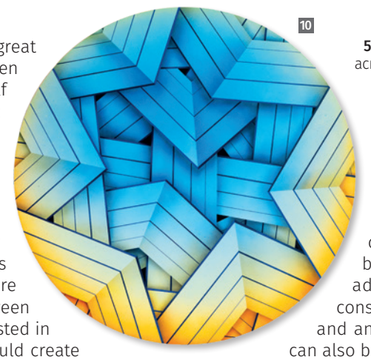

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5. *Tropical Dreams*, 2026, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.

6. Mural, Berlin, 2022.

7. Mural, Berlin, 2024.

8. Raws lettering, 2023.

9. *Forever Dreamer*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 100 cm.

10. *Coral*, 2026, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 120 cm.

deeply rooted in the way I construct my work. In my current creations, I've reduced it to some of its fundamental qualities: the line, the rhythm between forms, the way elements interact and create a sense of movement. These are all aspects I learned through writing. In a sense, I've deconstructed the letters to preserve only their language. What remains isn't the legibility associated with graffiti, but its energy and the way it occupies space.

You have questioned how far abstraction can go before a work stops being perceived as graffiti and becomes abstract art. Does this boundary still interest you today, or do you consider yourself to have moved beyond it?
It still interests me, but I approach it differently today. I'm less concerned with defining the precise point where graffiti becomes abstract art than with understanding why we feel the need to define it. When the immediately recognizable elements of graffiti disappear, certain traces of its origins may remain. This ambiguity allows the work to exist somewhere between two worlds. And it brings me back to a question that has become central to my practice: what, ultimately, makes something a work of art?

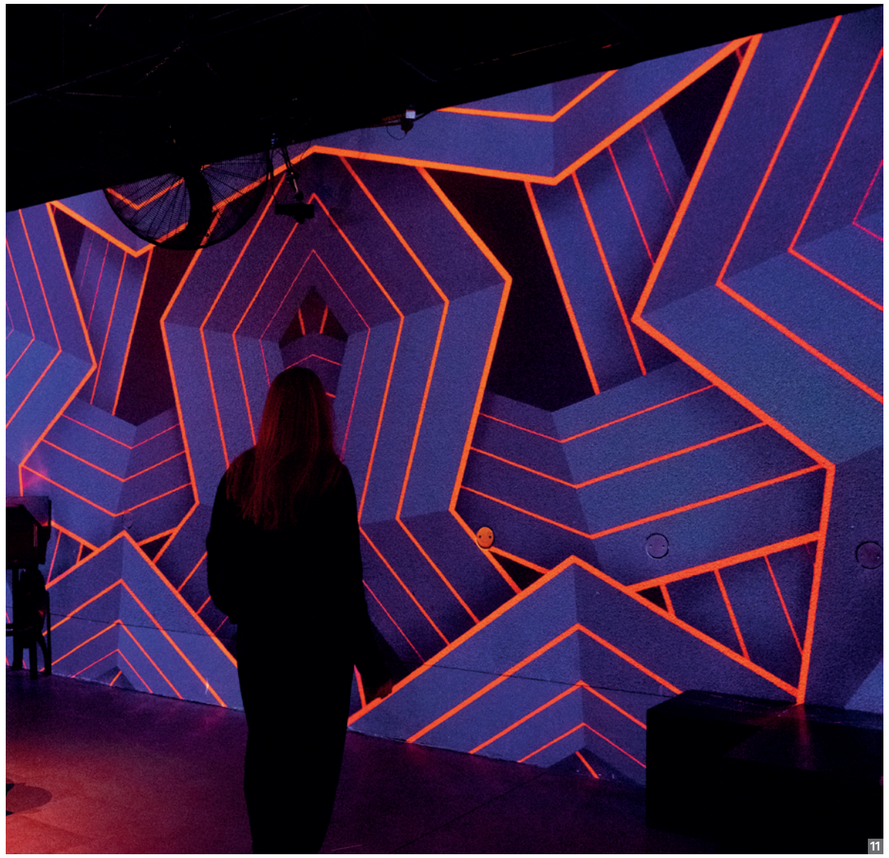
Yet you continue to use spray paint. Is it simply a tool you feel attached to, or does its ability to produce particular lines, textures and gestures remain fundamental to your pictorial language?
It's definitely much more than just an attachment to my past. Spray paint remains fundamental to my work because I consider it an extremely effective tool. The combination of its technical possibilities and its ability to produce highly opaque, saturated colors makes it difficult to replace. Spray paint allows me to create distinctive lines, textures and gestures, while giving me a level of technical control that I value greatly. Although it creates a symbolic connection between my current work and my beginnings in graffiti, above all, it has become an essential tool in my contemporary visual language.

What does your training as a graphic designer still bring to your painting today, and what have you had to unlearn?
Graphic design continues to bring a strong sense of composition, simplicity and visual hierarchy to my painting. I pay close attention to how shapes, lines, colors and negative spaces interact; my training taught me how these different elements can work together. What I've had to unlearn, however, is the idea that everything needs to be technically perfect. I now give increasing importance to imperfection, which has become an integral part of my work. Rougher brushstrokes, scratched surfaces or organic materials can deliberately disrupt the composition and its apparent precision. In fact, I consider this tension one of the most interesting aspects of my work: my pictorial language emerges from a highly controlled approach, but I allow human gesture and imperfection to interrupt this pursuit of perfection.

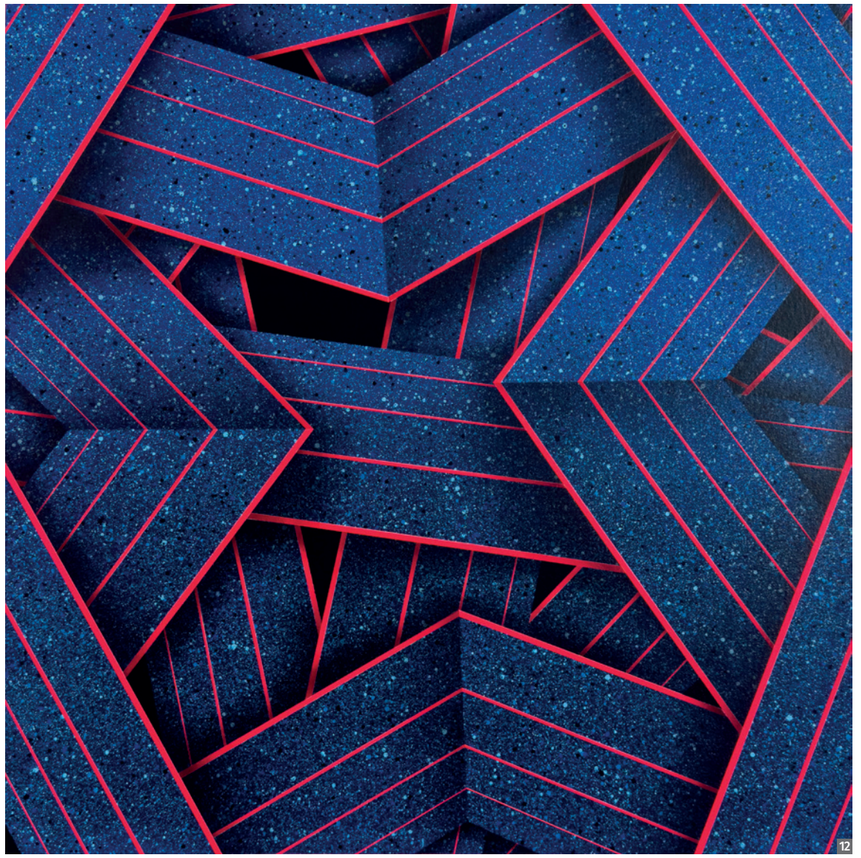
How did you move from working with letters to the lines that now create volumes, perspectives and depth in your compositions?
The transition happened gradually, but consciously. Until 2015, I mainly painted traditional graffiti, taking great satisfaction in what I was able to achieve. Then I wanted to take the next step and set myself new challenges. This led me to explore art history, abstraction and graphic design in greater depth. Abstraction opened up an entirely new playground for me. Initially, I combined letters with graphic elements. Gradually, I broke the letters down, softening their distinctive features until they eventually disappeared. At first, I painted abstract shapes and used bright colors. What remained were the lines, structures and relationships between them. Little by little, I became more interested in the line itself. I began exploring how it could create movement, tension, volume, perspective and depth through the interplay of light and shadow. So I didn't abandon lettering; I gradually deconstructed it until I discovered that the line itself could become a language.

What interests you about constructing your compositions in this way?
The tension between chaos and control! I begin without a predetermined composition, allowing the elements to develop intuitively and create a certain degree of disorder. Then I gradually introduce structure through lines, light and shadow. What fascinates me is the moment when something that began almost randomly starts forming a coherent composition. There's a constant dialogue between what I can control and what I have to adapt to. It reflects the world we live in. We're constantly confronted with complexity, uncertainty and an overwhelming flow of information. Yet chaos can also be beautiful and hold a certain potential. I try to introduce this positive dimension into my paintings, particularly through bright, bold colors.

In your work, color seems to structure space as much as it creates contrasts. How do you approach this dual function?
Color has always played a major role in my work. In graffiti, it's often used to create strong contrasts that immediately catch the eye. So I'm very aware of the impact of color. I'm also interested in the emotional effect certain colors can have on us. Depending on how they're combined, they create very different atmospheres and evoke equally different emotions, sometimes without us even realizing it.



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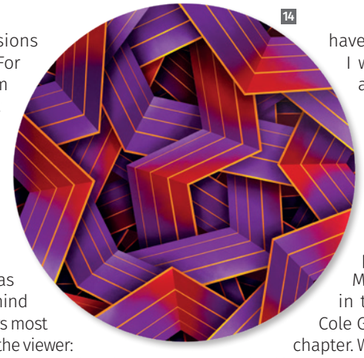
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In my current work, choosing the colors is generally one of the first decisions I make. I define a specific palette before even constructing the composition; it determines the overall atmosphere of the work. The contrasts between colors then structure the image and influence how the composition is perceived. For me, color therefore serves a dual function: emotional and structural. It can create tension, harmony or contrast, but it can also fundamentally influence how we feel about a work, even before we begin to analyze it.

You place great importance on contrasts – line and surface, light and shadow, color and the absence of color. What do these oppositions bring to your compositions?
I think contrasts play an essential role in the way I construct an image. They create tension and prevent the composition from becoming too static or predictable. I'm particularly interested in the contrast between elements that seem to belong to different worlds: precise lines alongside raw or organic surfaces; light against shadow; intense colors alongside areas almost entirely devoid of color... More broadly, this reflects my vision of the world: chaos can coexist with order, imperfection with precision, and tension with harmony. I'm not trying to resolve these oppositions, but to create a space where they can confront one another. I establish a certain harmony, then introduce elements that disrupt it. I want my paintings to hold the viewer's attention through their aesthetic qualities, while also opening up a space for reflection and raising questions. Ultimately, that's what these contrasts bring to my compositions: visual balance, but also tension, dialogue and questions.

Your compositions give an impression of exceptional control: the planes appear precisely arranged, the colors carefully calculated and the volumes meticulously constructed. How much room do you leave for chance and intuition?
I'm giving chance and intuition an increasingly important place in my work. It's something I want to explore further because I find the encounter between technical precision and emotion or intuition particularly interesting. So I deliberately introduce an element of randomness into my creative process. I create a background using splashes and randomly arranged colored structures built up in several layers, then precisely overlay my lines and volumes. The contrast between unpredictability and extremely controlled work creates a tension that is essential to me.

What concerns drive you to paint? And how do you incorporate them into your abstract works?
Much of my work stems from questions raised by the complexity of the world we live in. Political issues, social questions... as well as how we manage to establish order within chaos interest me as a human being. I approach these concerns through abstraction. Rather than illustrating a specific subject, I try to create visual situations that allow viewers to experience these tensions themselves on an emotional level. For me, abstraction offers the freedom to raise these questions without necessarily providing definitive answers.



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Can an abstract composition convey an idea precisely enough that it doesn't depend solely on the discourse accompanying it?
I don't think a work necessarily has to communicate the idea I had in mind when creating it. For me, what matters most is what happens when it encounters the viewer: the emotions and questions it provokes. In fact, I find it very stimulating when people see something completely different from what I had imagined. Their experiences, associations and interpretations enrich the work.

What are your main obsessions as a painter today?
Experimenting with different materials, exploring contrasts and wanting to bring new ideas to life. I have a very long list of concepts I want to explore, so there's always something new I want to try! Sometimes I feel a bit like a scientist faced with an enormous playground: I experiment to see what comes out of it!

What are your upcoming projects?
My exclusive representation in the United States by Oliver Cole Gallery in Miami marks a new chapter. We'll be presenting my work at Art Miami in December, which should allow me to reach a wider audience. I also have several murals scheduled, as well as the release of an art edition in collaboration with a photographer. More broadly, my goal for the coming months is to increase the international visibility of my work, bringing it into contact with new audiences and new contexts. I'd also like to build closer relationships with French galleries...

11. *Chaos*, 2025, wall animation, 60 x 3.2 m.

12. *Space Invador*, 2026, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.

13. *Cut Here*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 100 x 150 cm.

14. *Sans titre*, 2025, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 100 cm.

TO SEE
Oliver Cole Gallery
2750 NW 3rd Ave, Miami, FL 33127, United States
olivercolegallery.com
Instagram:
@olivercolegallery

Kai "Raws" Imhof:
rawsone.com
Instagram:
@rawsofficial