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CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTISTS

Jordan Holms



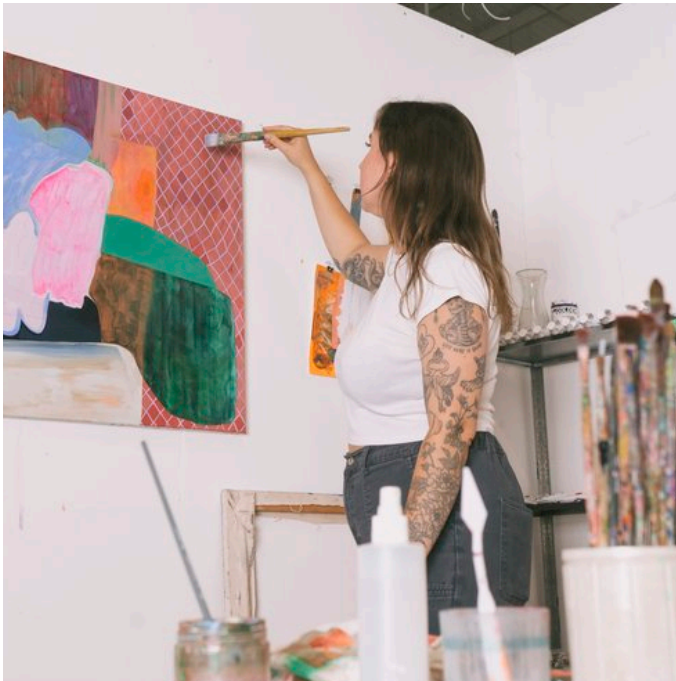


Photo Credit: Sarah Larby Photography (@sarah.larby.photo)

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How would you describe your work?

My practice grapples with our fraught relationship to material culture and the built environment. Working in painting, textiles, and sculptural installations, I'm interested in how aesthetic 'tastes' are materialized, organized, and made to mean. My references range across commodity culture, folk art, flea markets, construction zones, reality television, boutique concept stores, and so-called aspirational design accounts on social media. Using abstraction as a tool for translation, my work interprets the things we find in our homes and in the built environment that signal something about how

taste produces meaning. I then translate the associative properties of these materials – their colors, forms, and textures – into abstract compositions. In other words, my work attempts to make sense of what ‘having taste’ might look like in a moment wherein cultural trends are dictated by algorithms as well as elites. More recently, my work has taken a turn to address how material culture takes shape in the wake of the suburbanization and homogenization of digital advertising.

What inspires you?

Most of my sources of inspiration are happenstance, or unanticipated at least. I tend to take note of the idiosyncratic ways in which a given space and the things that make up that space signal their histories. I frequent antique shops and flea markets to observe the colors, patterns, and textures. I also spend a lot of time walking around the city, taking pictures of the color combinations of the row houses, or maybe the fluorescent spray-painted marks on sidewalks where the concrete has been compromised. What I mean by this is that my work is influenced by everything bound up in what we define as inhabited space; objects that are coded in ways that produce space - furniture, decorative moldings, cement barricades, window displays, wire fences, wallpaper, traffic signs, upholstery, pylons, venetian blinds. Each work is an amalgamation of imagery that has accrued over time, which I then reduce down to its most fundamental shapes, colors, and textures.

Much of my work features fluorescent colors. I’m interested in them because they are highly instructional colors. When we encounter neons or fluorescents in the built environment, they typically dictate how our bodies are meant to navigate through a space – they prohibit and beckon us into certain spaces, they keep us in our lane, they tell us where to enter and where to exit. They are incredibly authoritative colors, formally and politically, so I think there’s a lot of aesthetic and political richness there. Clearly I have a penchant for bright and fluorescent colors, as well as texture and pattern. Where I grew up, those kinds of palettes were very rare, even disdained. In that sense, the color choices become a way to undermine the civic or social authorities that dictate how a home, or a neighborhood, or an entire city “should look.”

Stripes and grids are an important part of my vernacular too. I think their duality is significant in the sense that, historically, they have operated as signifiers of both power and oppression in material culture -- think of something like the American flag versus 19th century prison uniforms, for instance. Architecturally, stripes and grids are also a means of policing how bodies are regulated in space. For instance, fences and window blinds both act as these delineations of space - we can't pass through them physically, but we can gaze through them and visually penetrate a space we aren't meant to enter. They designate space - they create a here and a there, an inside and an outside. And it is that "here and there" that I'm trying to collapse in on one another.

Recently, I have been incorporating textiles and references to fiber-based practices into my practice. My mother and both grandmothers were proficient quilters, knitters, and crocheters while I was growing up, and my sister is a talented fashion designer. So, I have always been exposed to various fiber practices. I have been experimenting with carpet tufting for some years now, and it feels like a natural progression for my work because rugs and carpets have an inextricable material relationship to space, especially domestic spaces.

Can you speak about your process?

I've learned that I'm a sprinter when it comes to painting, not a marathoner. I'll typically work in short bursts throughout a session. I don't like to work on one thing for a sustained period of time because all of the work is reciprocal, they are material echoes of each other, so throughout a session I will alternate between painting, carpet tufting, and more experimental collages and watercolors. I also enjoy the reciprocity between the tufts and the paintings. I often borrow compositional elements or colors from one medium and integrate it into the other, so my work really hinges on translation as a formal strategy in that sense.

It's important to consider things outside of actual art production as part of my process too. In the past, I've been tough on myself for not working longer hours in the studio, but I've come to realize that a large part of what I do requires consistent observation; these days I spend a lot of time walking around the city or riding buses just to take in the imagery around me. I have long collected imagery relating to the

built environment, some is mined from the Internet, but I also document the things that I encounter in my day to day movements.

I'm fascinated by all the components that make up a space. And I love to catalogue things, mentally and physically. I used to make physical collages from my image bank and then make paintings based on those collages, but I have since built up such an extensive visual lexicon in my head that now I often draw on this memory bank instead to compose the works. Most of my current works are not physically pre-determined, but I will mentally reorganize the colors, forms, and textures until I can compose all these elements into something that I want to make. I refer to this aspect of my process as chewing the cud, and I've come to really value this kind of non-traditional research as equally productive and critical as time in the studio.

How did you become interested in art?

I have been saturated in art for as long as I can remember. As a young child living in New York, I was very fortunate that my parents had the time, access, and desire to take me to museums and introduce me to many different kinds of art. My mother was an elementary school teacher for 30+ years, so she knew how to introduce me to art in a way that would appeal and we would spend time in museums together learning about the work. She would often ask me to go around the museum and count how many horses or dogs were in the paintings (I loved animals and still do), so I became comfortable around art and art spaces quite early on, and I'm very grateful to my family for affording me that privilege.

Around the same time, when I was maybe 4 or 5, I started making these abstract glitter paintings and would try to sell them to my family members for a loonie or toonie (one and two dollar Canadian coins). I would even write the price on the front of the work, so there was no confusion about what was at stake. The point is that I've just always made things and learned early on that it can be so rewarding to make your own things, even if they don't turn out the way you intended.

What has always appealed to me about art is that it allows you to be and do anything, you get to take up different roles, not only as an artist, but also as a researcher, a writer, a curator, a (pseudo) scientist, anthropologist, psychologist,

architect, designer or whatever it may be. That really drew me to art because it allows me to collapse all of my niche interests.

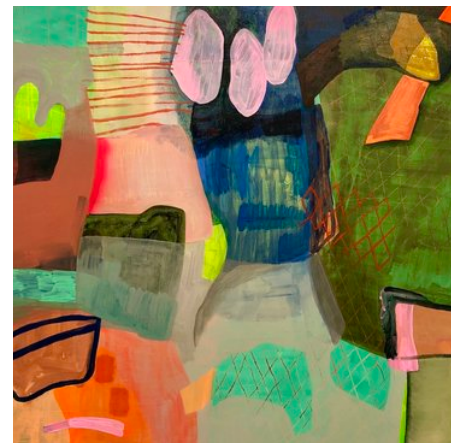
Do you have any favorite artists, movies, books, or quotes?

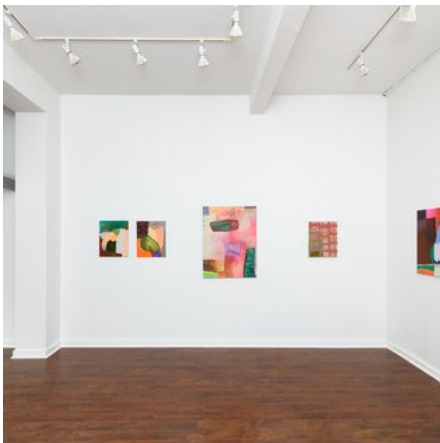
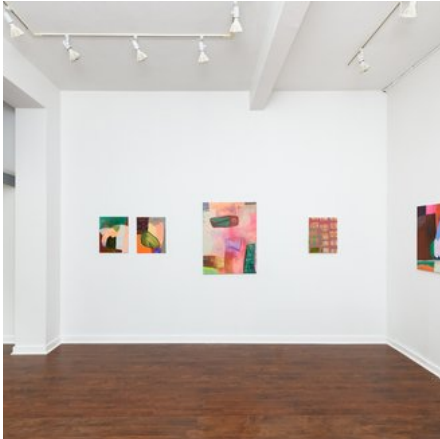
Right now, I've been looking at a lot of work by Caragh Thuring, Laurel Sparks, and Josh Faught. I've also been looking into a lot of traditional American quiltmakers, and of course there are always the more historical references like Henri Matisse or Agnes Martin, both of whose work has informed my practice from the beginning.

Lately, my favorite books are *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder and *How to Do Nothing* by Jenny Odell. My favorite movie is *Blow The Man Down*, directed by Bridget Savage Cole and Danielle Krudy, but my one true love is reality television. I don't really discriminate between high and low-brow when it comes to consuming media.

What advice do you have for younger artists?

Just focus on the work. And listen to your gut.





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