

Lauren Luloff on Creating Paintings without Canvas, Primer and Paint

by Pat Rogers July 22, 2017

Lauren Luloff is no stranger to paths not frequently taken. Attracted to textiles, she spent time studying traditional block printing in India that use natural materials only under a master artisan, entering a tradition practiced by men alone. Attracted to nature, she finds cemeteries a quiet place to commune and escape from the urban noise and traffic in her Brooklyn neighborhood. Interested in color and where art can take her, Luloff now unveils two new bodies of work that present a new medium for the artist and a new technique in the mixed media paintings she's known for. Her art is currently on view through July 24, 2017 at Halsey Mckay Gallery in East Hampton, N.Y.

In the biggest surprise in her third solo show with the Hamptons gallery, "Lauren Luloff - Sundrawn" presents selections from a new ongoing series of ceramics. The sculptural works, installed on the wall, are an exploration of color for Luloff that adds a tactile element to her artist practice, the artist said in a phone interview. Made from glazed stoneware, working with clay and the limited color palette that an electric firing can render, the process also adds an enticing element of surprise.

This stems from the visible results after the pieces are fired in a kiln as well as discoveries in the ways clay can be manipulated to embrace color in unexpected ways, said Luloff. Both fun and challenging, embarking on the series also contributes to Luloff's appreciation and joy that art making brings. Like her paintings, the ceramics conjure mood and connect with viewers in a non-verbal pathway. They also connect with Luloff's love of nature and as her inspiration for the new painting series that weave figurative and identifiable forms into the abstraction.

Her paintings have the same effect. Created from bedsheets that are ripped into sections, painted and suspended, the new works are inspired by landscapes, nature and natural forms found in the Brooklyn cemetery and a nearby community garden, Luloff seeks peace and inspiration and soaks in the sensations being among nature allows. Hydrangeas, sunflowers, begonias, pine, spruce and hollyhock make their way into these mixed media works revealed through paintings on fabric that are collaged to create compositions that inspire introspection. Abandoning paint all together, the natural forms and patterns are created through painting with bleach on bedsheets. The bleach creates a palette of subtle colors as undertones and contributes to ethereal sensations her work invokes.



"Untitled I" by Laure Luloff, 2015 Glazed Stoneware, 16.5 x 11 x 2.75 inches. Courtesy of Halsey McKay Gallery.

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In the works on view, the paintings are stretched across frames and the collaged elements appear to float, despite being tethered. For previous exhibitions held in New York and East Hampton, Luloff has suspended paintings so they drape mid-room to enhance this aspect of her work.

Pat Rogers of Hamptons Art Hub caught up with Lauren Luloff via email to discuss her new work as the final days come to a close at her Hamptons exhibition at Halsey McKay Gallery. The exhibition is on view from July 8 to 24, 2017.

Pat Rogers: What is your inspiration for your art?

Lauren Luloff: The inspiration for this series of works are plants and trees in my neighborhood. I paint trees from life in a cemetery close to my home, where life is bursting from rolling hills covered in amazing, huge trees and glorious plants and graves dating back to the 1800s. I also work in my overgrown community garden where the principal gardener grows dozens of types of flowers, exploding through the fence and between the plots. It's fantastic. When working with flowering plants there is an urgency:

the flowers change form and begin to die day by day. Each new sitting, I arrive to a morphed plant from the day before and I have to search for a way to enter the drawing and find continuity. With the trees—especially the evergreens—it's different. I can be slower and take on a larger section of the tree, often spending weeks under the branches making more complex studies.



"Split" by Lauren Luloff, 2016. Bleached bedsheets and fabric, 47 x 46 inches. Courtesy of Halsey McKay Gallery.

PR: How did this series begin?

LL: This series began as a result of a trip to India in 2011, where I studied traditional blockprinting. I worked with the amazing blockprinting master Irfan Khatri, in Ajrakhpur, a small village in Gujarat. It was incredible to create work where the imagery became imbedded in the fabric. When I returned from my trip, I stepped away from the sculptural paintings I had been making for years to begin two-dimensional work. I began creating my own collage materials by painting fabrics with patterns, using different strengths of bleach, to imitate the resist and dye technique I discovered in India. The bleach paintings evolved from pattern to still life objects and plants in the studio, to paintings of my husband and friends. Now I am focusing on the beautiful growing things I can find outside close to my home.

PR: How does it differ from the work you're known for?

LL: I think that people familiar with my work have seen related parts of this series. My solo show at Marlborough Contemporary in 2015 was my first exhibition of works similar to these; large,

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mostly figurative paintings, composed from bleach painted areas collaged with soft transparent fabrics stretched over frames.

In this body of work, up to the present, there is no canvas, no primer and no paint. In works before this show I was using similar bleaching techniques but I was incorporating them into primed muslin surfaces that I then partially painted with oil. I also made unstretched bleach paintings that I suspended from the ceiling. I had a solo show at The Hole in 2014 where I showed both of these types of paintings—the stretched bleach and oil paintings with the soft bleach paintings hung from the center of the room, staggered throughout the space.

At that time I was also making these tiny paintings with transparent fabric, rabbit skin glue and bits of patterned fabric. They were also placed throughout the space.

PR: Can you say something about your process?

LL: This process is sloooowwwwww. The bleach drawings of plants take many hours for many days or weeks. Looking into a furry pine tree and trying not to lose your place can be staggering and overwhelming after a few hours! There's a lot of internal measuring that takes place in drawing from life; something that I'm learning now for the first time, as I worked much more abstractly in the past.

The collage part is equally as slow, actually much slower than the drawing. It takes months for the bleach—painted pieces to land in place—to find their combinations, their glazes of color and backgrounds.

For example, *After Rain* I worked on for a whole year. I tried many combinations of materials over many months before I found the painting it became. When it finally fell into place it was a nice humming feeling- the colors felt like a memory of the ecstatic vibrancy after a good rain.

PR: How does this body of work impact you as an artist?

LL: The best part of this process is that it encourages me to spend quiet hours outside in nature by myself. It's wonderful. The time I spend with the trees and flowers really fuels me. I get very involved and attached to my subject and when I step away and "wake up" to this stunning natural world around me I feel so grateful. It's such a relief and respite from my incredibly urban experience.



"Hollyhocks" by Lauren Luloff, 2016. Bleached bedsheets and fabric, 80 x47 inches. Courtesy of Halsey McKay Gallery.

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"After Rain (Spruce)" by Lauren Luloff, 2017. Bleached bedsheets and fabric, 88 x 91 inches. Courtesy of Halsey McKay Gallery.

PR: Do you have a favorite piece?

LL: I have different relationships to them all. I love parts of them all especially because they hold the experience of their making for me, and in this way, they hold my history. The way I've spent my time, my life. *After Rain*, in a way, is my favorite because I struggled with it for so long, put it away, thought it would never find its way and then finally it did! And it felt risky and crazy to use so many colors together, but so fun.

I love *Purple Hydrangea* very much too. I like how dark and juicy it is. I am very in love with that particular Hydrangea tree; it is the subject of many paintings.

"Lauren Luloff: Sun Drawn" is on view from July 8 to 24, 2017 at Halsey McKay Gallery, 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.halseymckay.com.