

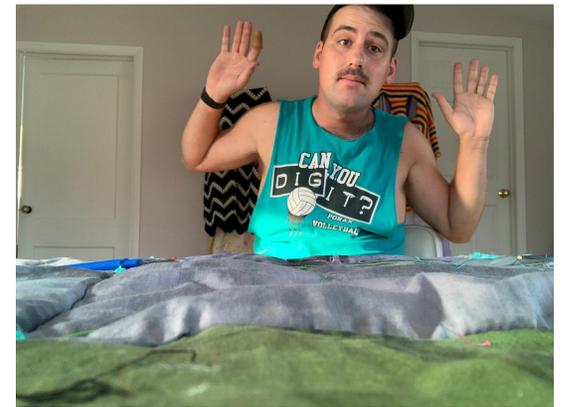
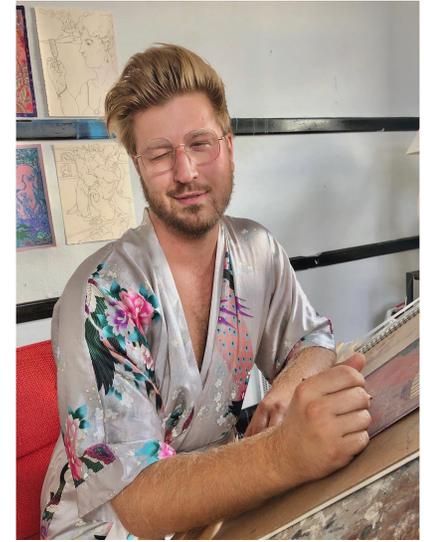
Waves, Particles, and the Refusal of the Totalitarian:

April 09, 2018 in Jen Shepard, East

A Conversation with Theresa Daddezio about her painting and curatorial work, quantum physics, and the politics of abstraction

Instagram: [@thecoastalpost](https://www.instagram.com/thecoastalpost)







Walking into Theresa's studio, I am immediately struck by the large windows, the quality of the afternoon light streaming in, and the cacophonous sound of car engines revving and honking that assaults my ears through a casually ajar window. The room is sparse and fairly large. It is adorned with a grouping of paintings that are neatly and thoughtfully installed, while a smattering of unselected works casually lean beneath. There is a torn, ratty studio couch in the corner next to a table that is strewn with various cups and utensils. Theresa offers me a glass of water with crimson hibiscus petals, as I survey a slumping snake-shaped cactus that perches at the center of a long window sill surrounded by a tousel of loosely arranged postcards.

I have known Theresa for a couple of years. I know that I met her at an opening originally, but I am not sure which one. Our acquaintance and friendship has just sort of budded naturally, as we always have a great time chatting whenever we bump into each other. Theresa is friendly, vivacious, and funny. And she is also very bright. And part of why I like talking to her is that she is always ready with a critical lens and a thoughtful point-of-view. I've also always been a fan of her work and am excited to see the new stuff and chat. I start by asking her a few questions about herself, and then our conversation proceeds to unfurl in a meandering way.

The following is a partial transcript of our conversation, edited for clarity.

Where are you from, and how long have you been in the City?

I'm from upstate New York, near Binghamton, but originally the small town Hancock, New York at the base of the Catskills. It was a railroad town with a stone quarry. For a



period of time, my mom was a principal of a K-12 school. Then my family moved closer to Binghamton, NY. Where I went to high school.

I feel like that makes you a New Yorker, or someone who was already a New Yorker before they came here.

A little. I definitely knew that this is where I wanted to move. I went to SUNY Purchase for undergrad, which is only a half an hour outside of the City, which is really great because it gives you this space to create without all the distractions.

Theresa starts telling me about how she went to undergrad at SUNY and became friends with our mutual friend, Jen Hitchings who is also her curatorial partner. I was always curious about their curatorial projects, which I am not super familiar with so decided to ask her some questions about that. The group is called Associated.

So tell me about your curatorial project, Associated. Did you guys ever have a brick and mortar?

Yes, it was off the Jefferson L stop in the Active Space building. **It** was a studio space that was attached to a gallery, and sometimes when the Active Space didn't have anything going on we would branch out in there.. we did a few partner shows. It gave us more room to host.

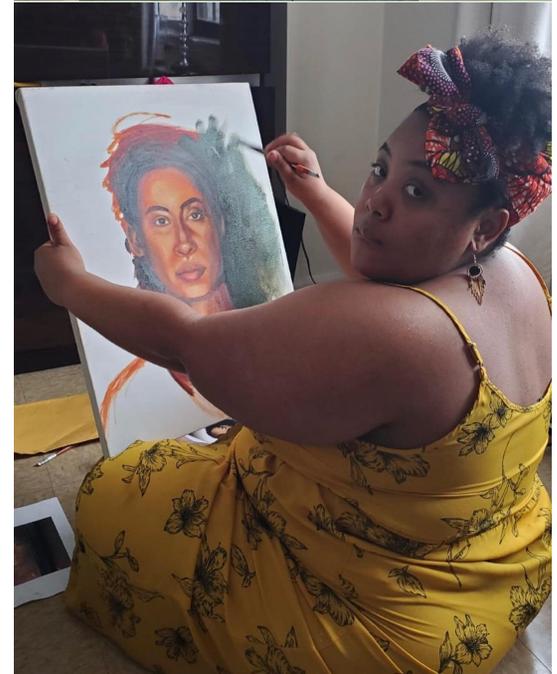
I definitely remember going to the Active Space but usually for Bushwick Open Studios.

Yeah they definitely had the BOS space..

The Seeking Space space? Right.

[laughter]

Did you and Jen [Hitchings] start curating in undergrad or just when you moved here?



We started here. We curated once or twice together in the Bogart building when it was just starting and some other space on Meadows St, and then Jen started talking to Julian [Jimarez-Howard]. It happened very organically. We were just friends that decided to do things together.

Do you guys still do it? Oh yeah you curated something at Brethren recently right?

Yeah, it's hard since we don't have a physical space now, but we do proposals. We've only done two in the past few years because we are all involved in our individual projects right now.

Do you feel like curating has influenced your work at all or is it more of a separate thing that you do?

I think that exposure to different artists who I might not have otherwise known of has been influential in opening myself to different practices. A lot of the shows are thematically separate from what I'm interested in.

Right. I remember the show at Brethren felt more conceptual or political.

To me that's helpful, because that's a side of me that I can compartmentalize. I don't need to put my politics into my paintings. I think that there is a politic in any painting, but I don't make my practice out of it directly. Curating shows that have a critical lens is helpful. It's a good way to explore what other artists are doing without investing myself in the practice.

Do you ever feel weird about making abstract work, because this political climate is so fucked up? What do you feel is abstract art's role in that?

No, I think it's as much a form of resistance as any kind of peaceful resistance could be. And I also definitely participate in activism outside of my studio. But just to carve out a space for yourself for humanity, for poetry is so important. And I think finding or creating beauty is a way to resist oppression.



I like what you said– that carving out that space for poetry is political, because it's a form of saying "no we are still here, and we still care about humanity and what makes us human."

You are not going to emotionally repress me through your terrible policies. It's a way of resisting. [...]And there's something I have always liked about abstraction– that it refuses one interpretation. So in a way, it refuses totalitarianism.

And it refuses the two-party system. You're right I love that.

[laughter]

And it also asks the viewer to participate. You have to interpret it. And it's not telling you what to think. [...] I like to get people to give a cold read, and it's so fascinating. [...] Not that my work is going necessarily to be about more of those things.

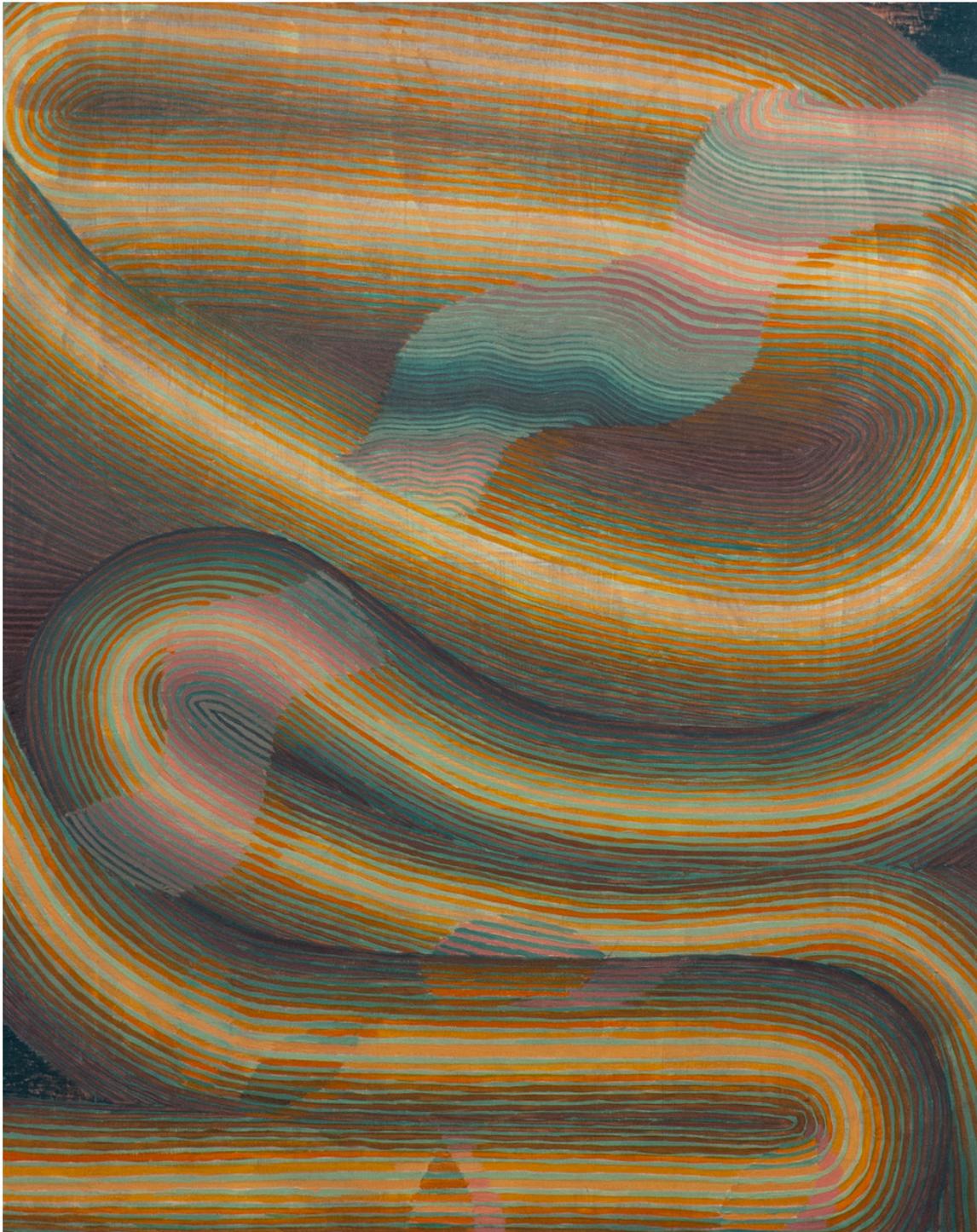
**Having grown up upstate, do you feel like nature has a big influence on the work?
Because I do get a sort of post-analog vibe but maybe something organic too.**

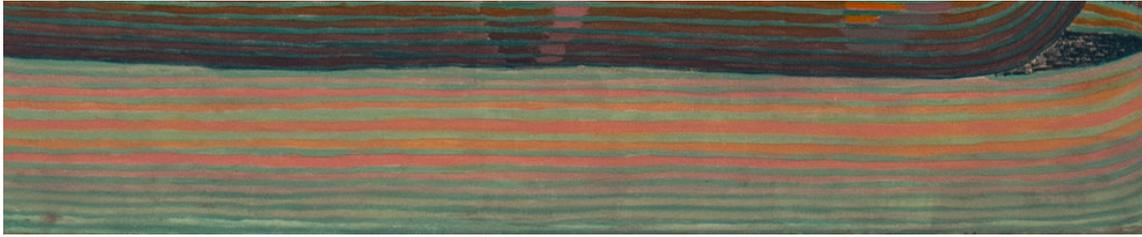
Yeah, the handmade verses mechanical... I think in a way both of those things are really woven into my work in ways that contradict each other. And I'm interested in them pushing up against each other. But nature definitely plays a huge part in my work. And it's not just observable nature but physical phenomenon– the phenomenology of light and how it moves across a surface and how it's broken up in space, even deep space...

Like OUTER SPACE yeah! [Laughter]

How light kind of refracts and you can tell how far away something is based on channels of lights– the redshift and the blueshift. There are aspects you can think about– like physics, but then also you can just look at something in nature or in the world and analyze its physicality. My work pulls from different modes of orientation of how we find ourselves in the world.







Slide, 2018, Oil on canvas, 32" x 22"

So organic and mechanical...

Organic because it's taken from observable reality, and mechanical, because I do construct these very limited systems in which to apply the paint.

What's an example of one of those systems?

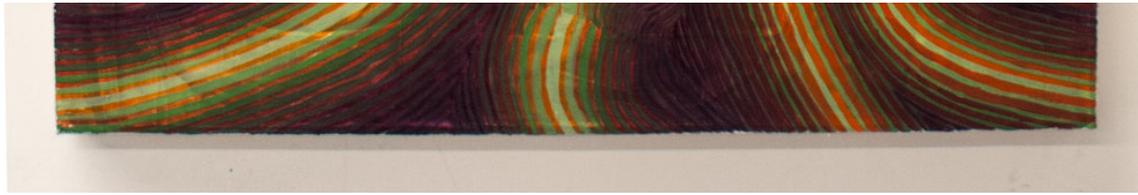
The palette is a big one. It will really only be three colors and then mixing them in so that they become gray where the colors meet each other, creating form. [pointing to the painted lines on a piece] The more distant they are, the closer the relationship. But what seems more bulbous or near you is purer, so it's what happens when you see color relationships. So then one is gray, but then it becomes more saturated when the lines are further apart in the same way that color splits into different wavelengths when it describes form.

But then I started to experiment with more relief. So, there's a game I play where what would appear to be in front and what would appear to be behind are flipped. So, the shadows are thicker, and forms above the shadows are thinner and more transparent.

They look complex in a photograph but are so much more nuanced in person.

I think the photo obscures the handmade quality. Because I'm not trying to make something perfect.





Branched, 2018, Oil on canvas, 32"x22"

Yes, there is very clearly the mark of your hand... I do get an outer space vibe, which I love. And I think a lot about quantum physics in my own work...

It's difficultly complex and so I mostly discuss them in terms of light. I also think of them as channels. They form energy but also condense the space so they become more of their own system within the canvas. When I first started making these though, I was thinking of a place beyond this earth... I think I have brought them back to more of an earthly quality, as something that may exist in this world. Yet there is something off about them that refuses direct interpretation: It's not quite a flower, it's not quite a plant.

Yeah, I think of tree rings and also maybe an atomic field. I think, are these the rings where electrons jump around?

Because waves can be particles and particles can be waves. It's a paradox of the analyst.

That's one of the things that fascinates me. The idea that an electron can be in two places at once, and what if it changes when we observe it?

Yeah because we are not separate from the equation, so we have atoms and we are made of particles.





View to the Center, 2018, Oil on canvas 44"x 34"

How do we objectively observe something we are a part of?

It's all variables.. and how do you make sense of it?

I like to think about that and then relate it back to the political conversation of how nothing is what it seems.

[Laughter]

Around this point we devolve into a sort of convoluted conversation about quantum physics. Convoluted, because we are both very interested in the subject but have limited knowledge and/or a limited vernacular to talk about it. We laugh about our ineptitude fumble back to discussing the paintings.

I feel like we got waaay down a rabbit hole really fast.

[laughter]

I'm curious also about this view. You are literally staring at crazy traffic in the middle of Manhattan with these huge windows. Do you feel like that gets into the work at all?

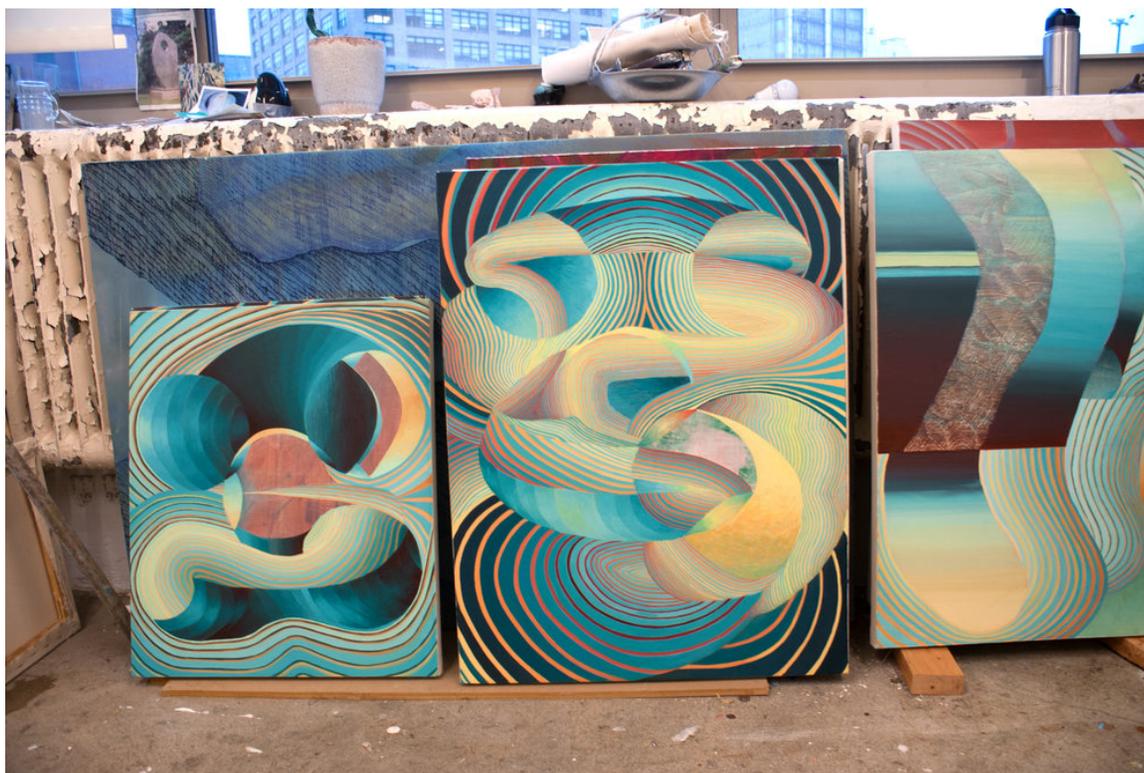
An element of sound or a musicality has found its way into my work. One project I revisited was a science experiment of sorts: finding ways to translate sound vibrations into the visual.

When I look at how the lines are repeated, it's very rhythmic.

They aren't based specifically on that but, do you know Chladni patterning? If something vibrates on a surface, it will snap into these patterns. I set up these experiments where I took sound vibrations from a speaker and used ink on water. It looked like concentric rings on a tree. That's where this structural motif came from initially. And then other elements of the painting– I pulled with other physical elements such as sound.

Theresa starts to show me a bunch of other work, pulling out older paintings.

And that's funny, because these [older paintings] are when I was still imagining a space outside of earth that could be hospitable to life... but then I thought– Oh! I need to narrow the focus, because that is so vast. And I think what I am doing even in terms of making them is so much more about the mark and about the process of making them, and I think that's how they became more earthy and more muddy.



So that was you moving away from outer space and towards earth.

Yeah, I feel like they are much more connected to my own physicality and these [gesturing to older paintings] are much more like cerebral imaginings...

And they feel more like off your hand or outside of you..

Oh I'm going far back into the archive. [laughing]

And THAT feels way more planetary too, with circle shapes... [pointing to another painting]

But it still becomes a little like a creature?

With a cat eye I think...

And this one that is balancing on my radiator... There is definitely a relationship to a mediated landscape with these channels and marks, that are a kind of netting but also a visual element to obstruct what would be behind. It took me a long time to break out of that.

[laughter]

This is what I do.

And I don't know how to do anything else [...] Yes, that is really challenging...[nodding] I had to fuck shit up for a while. What's interesting to me is like looking back— drawing and painting has been recurrent in my practice. They are paintings, but they are definitely also drawings.

Oh! Because you are right. these are like super linear... not much blending etc.

These are blended [gesturing towards the older work] and it really bothered me that I had to blend the colors to get the effect that I wanted. I was like, I don't want this, this isn't the right effect. What if I went back to a pastel palette?

I don't know what it is about that one. It feels super, super different. It feels more retro to me?

Yeah definitely!

Yeah, there is something that reminds me of the color palette of our living room when I was a kid.

[Cracking up]

I think at the time it was good interior design!

[laughter]

I was a TA for a color theory course with the painter Gabrielle Evertz. We largely focused on Johannes Itten, the work of Bridget Riley and Paul Klee. I think that even though I felt a bit resistant to learning, it just happened.

I was a TA and a student at the same time without realizing that I was learning so much from her. She was such a good teacher that I was also learning while assisting.

So, do you really sit down and think about [...] ahead of time go "I'm going to create this type of palette" and then methodically do it?

Yeah! It's fairly methodical. I do and sometimes I think it's like really obvious. I think that there are always parallel elements in the world that your work relates to that come from your subconscious. Sooo..

Sooo the cactus??

[laughter]

T: Yeah, but like it's head...

Pointing to the same nodding, phallic looking cactus that I spied when I first entered the room. It is a lonely slumped obelisk in a pot. It is the only plant in the room. Theresa later notes that she's "interested in the ways that the cactus grows from inside itself, repeating it's exterior structure," which makes sense for her practice. But in the moment I find it comical. It honestly looks like a slouch sock. It occupies a pot that is roughly centered on the elaborately long window sill that perches beneath the window, which frames a scene of spaghettied strands of vehicles that feel very quintessentially New York City. I realize that the phallus that is this lonesome ambassador to the Holland Tunnel has reared it's smooth round head into nearly every one of Theresa's newer paintings. This makes us both laugh really hard.

[laughing]

SHIT. He looks like a cucumber!

Yeah! This is the plant that I keep resuscitating.





Oh my god you are painting him over and over! And you just realized that you are obsessed with this cactus.

I haven't named him, because naming him would take away from his cactus-ness.

Ahh and yeah yet another way that nature is getting into this work...

Yeah, which reminds me that I had someone ask me "in jest" if I meditate when I make these. Because there is that history or genre of painting where you make a meditative object. And I just want to squash that, because I definitely think when I make these.

But for me I look at these and I think. You must sort of lose yourself while making them...

Well there is definitely like a slowing down of time and kind of getting into certain rhythms.

[And] there is a definite shift in my experience of time while I'm making these. **[But if I zone out]** I know I'm in the danger zone.

Because you are afraid you are going to make really unconscious choices that aren't correct? Or...

No. I think it will become too balanced. There are a lot of little subtleties that I work with.

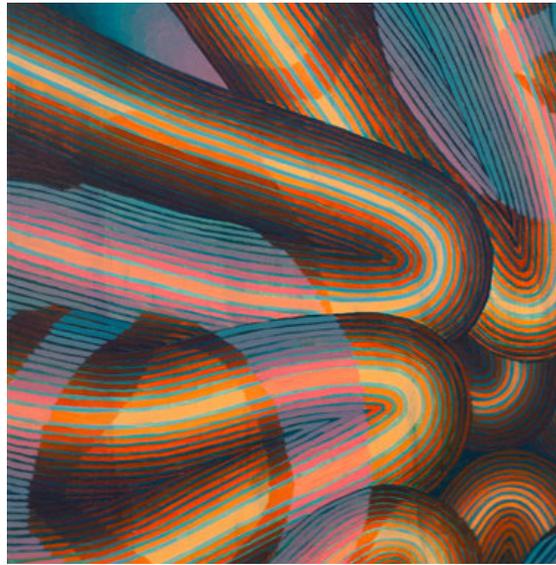
And that's what you mean about how you are constantly thinking, because you are thinking "now at this point– it's going to be a heavier line." Ok gotcha. That makes sense, because you do have to be really hyper-aware. It almost feels there could be a texture to the surface, so it could be fabric because there is such nuance??

Momentarily we wrap up and head down the street to check out Theresa's current show at Barney Savage Gallery. She has two pieces in the show, and it's a smart new space with high ceilings and a frosted sliding glass door that elegantly hides a tiny office where the curator, and proprietor, Julian Lorber, greets us. He chatters and jokes with Theresa briefly and then gives us an informal but generous tour of the space and an explanation about the other artists in the show. It's a good show featuring a mix of elegant and quirky pieces. A few shaped canvases with garish neon colors by Emily Kiacz, a few subtle geometric color explorations by Corydon Cowansage, (whose work I already love), and some expressive Lucy Mink Covello's are in good company with Theresa's complex abstractions. I'm eager to see what more comes out of this space and especially what comes out of the intellect and imagination of Theresa Daddezio. I'm looking forward to future conversations about the convergences of the universe and that slumpy cactus; perhaps a macrocosmic/microcosmic mascot for an uncertain future.*

** "Color Wheel," at Barney Savage Gallery closed on March 18th for installation views [click here](#).*

For more information on Theresa please visit her [website](#), or check out her [instagram](#).

Additional Images:



Tags: Theresa Daddezio, Jen Shepard

♥ 1 Likes ↻ Share

← FORM

HIGH VISIBILITY THE WORK OF LAWRENCE NAFF →

Comments (0)

Newest First Subscribe via e-mail

Preview

POST COMMENT...



Copyright © 2020, The Coastal Post. All rights reserved