



Through Washes and Layers

ABSTRACTIONS BY LEXI LALONDE



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Project Statement

Through Washes and Layers uses fully process driven methods of pouring, scratching, concealing, revealing, and splattering. The works demonstrate no allegiance to any one type of mark making, but borrow from the rich and expansive history of painting. Words carved into wet paint make reference to Twombly, large swaths of pastel colors are reminiscent of Frankenthaler, and thick scribbles reach back to memories of seeing De Kooning for the first time.

I have deconstructed the vocabulary of these artists and reconfigured their gestures to create a new conversation. Neon pinks and vivid shades of teal explode across pastels, allowing the bold pigments to sing. Lines dance along the canvases, leading the observers gaze through shifts of depth and scale, inviting them to be immersed beyond words. Setting the works against a bold magenta backdrop, I have created an environmental kaleidoscope for viewers to enter and immerse themselves in. While the works pull techniques from my predecessors, they do not ask to be fully understood or decoded, but simply experienced.

Exhibition Overview



Completed exhibition *Through
Washes and Layers*, April 14, 2023



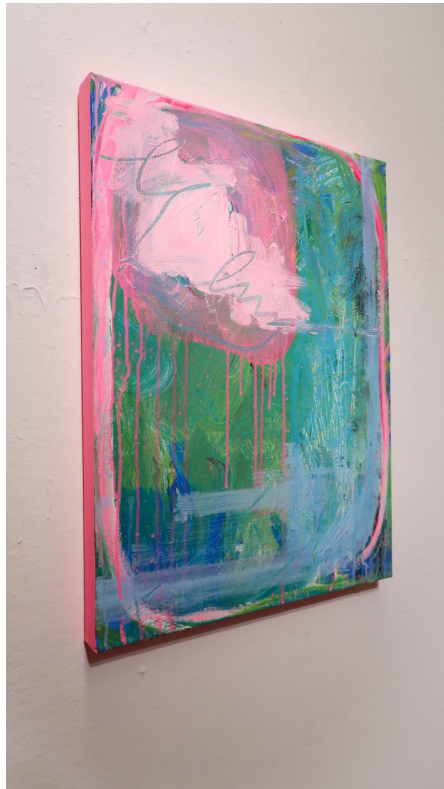
Please Don't Take This the Wrong Way
20x20, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas





Joann Fabrics is on Fire,
11x17, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas





Losing Steam,
18x24, acrylic and oil pastel on canvas

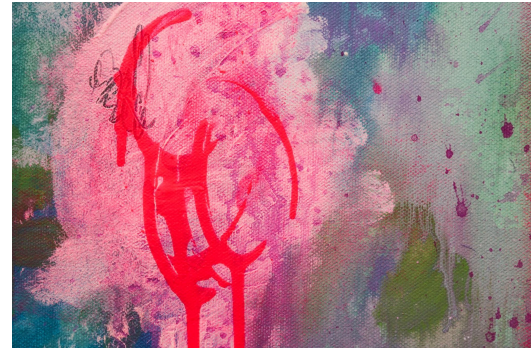


Woman with a Parasol Hanging in My Mothers Living Room,
16x20, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas



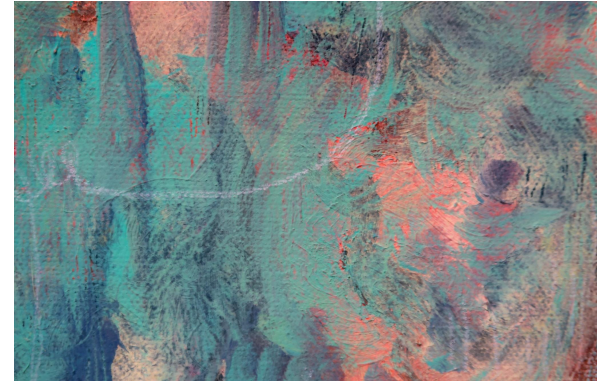


One Final Detail
16x20, acrylic, oil pastel and colored pencil on canvas



Consider Texture

20x20, oil, acrylic, model magic and colored pencil on canvas



Small
8x8, oil, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas



Seaweed and Cranberries,
12x12, acrylic on canvas



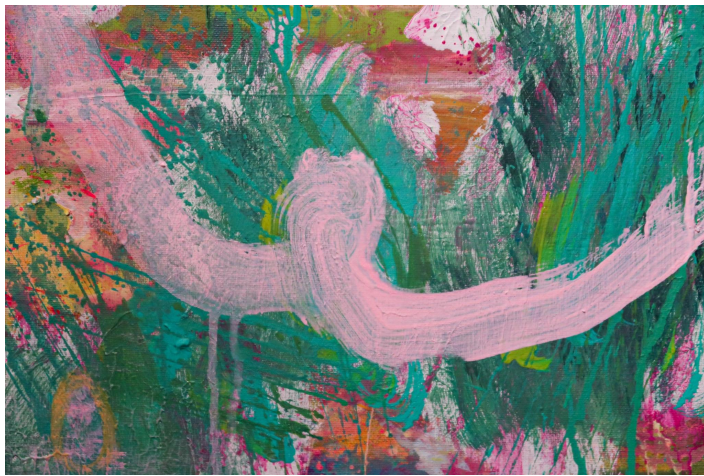
Curtains,
7x9, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas



Optimist
24x30, acrylic on canvas



Death by Lawnmower,
16x20, acrylic on canvas





No One Sees the Flames
16x20, acrylic on canvas



Garden Party
8x10, acrylic on canvas

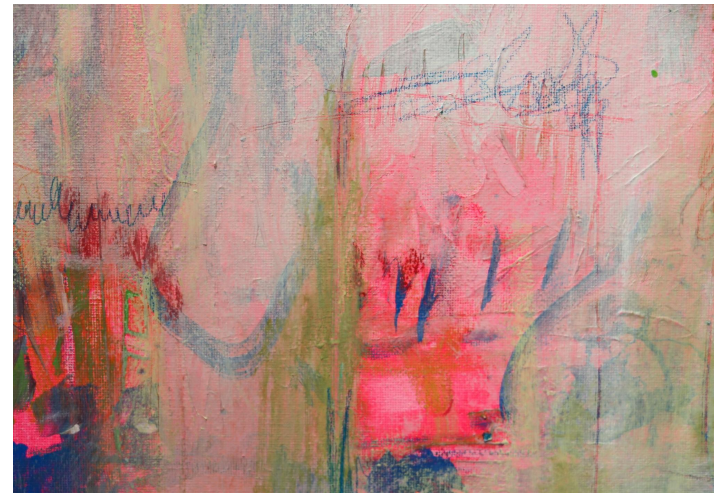


Myself, Rejected,
16x20, acrylic on canvas





Summer of 2021,
16x20, acrylic, oil pastel and colored pencil on canvas





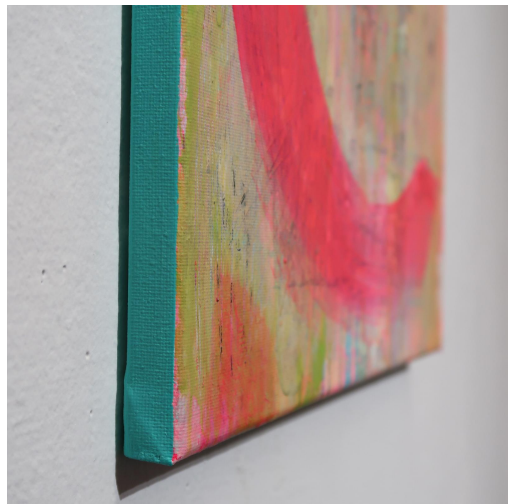
Neon,
6x6, acrylic on canvas

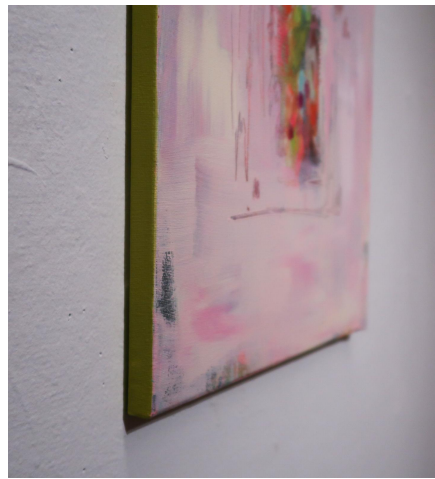


Birthday Party for One,
6x6, acrylic on canvas

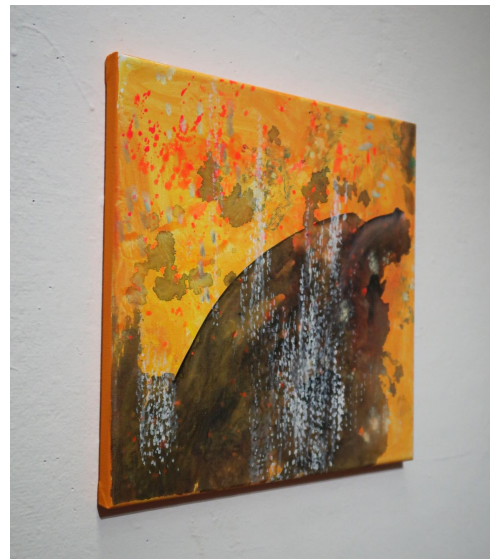


I'll Love You Forever
12x12, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas

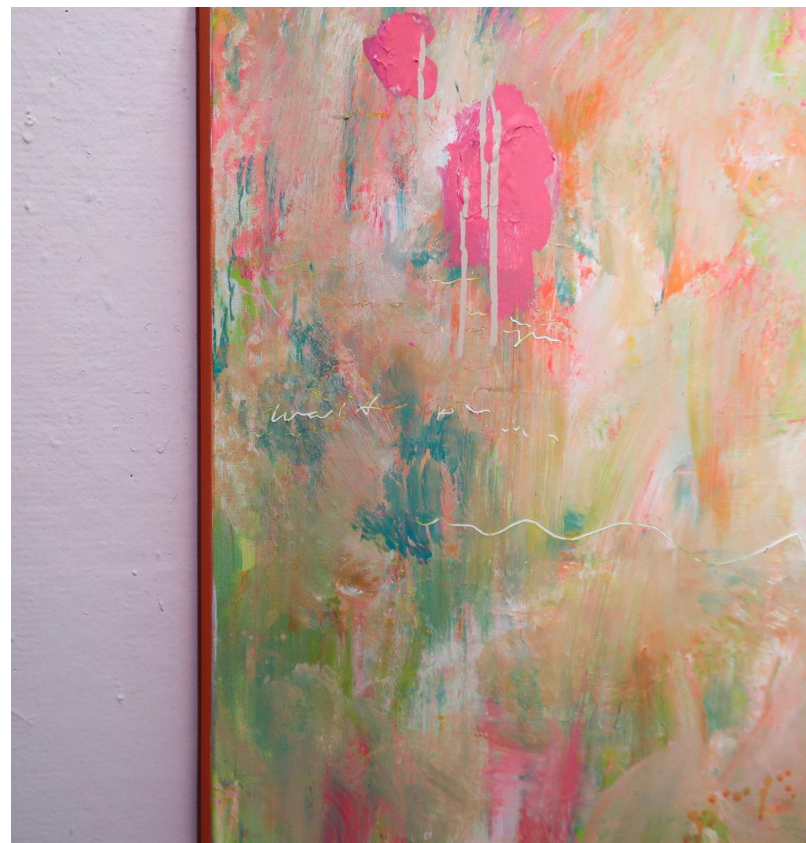
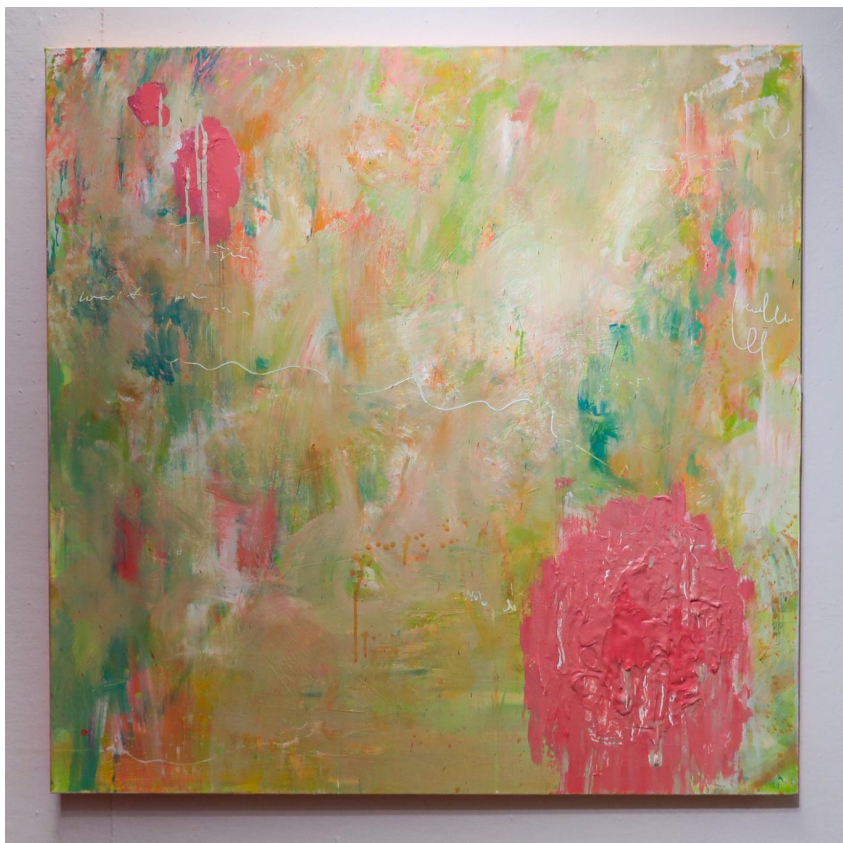




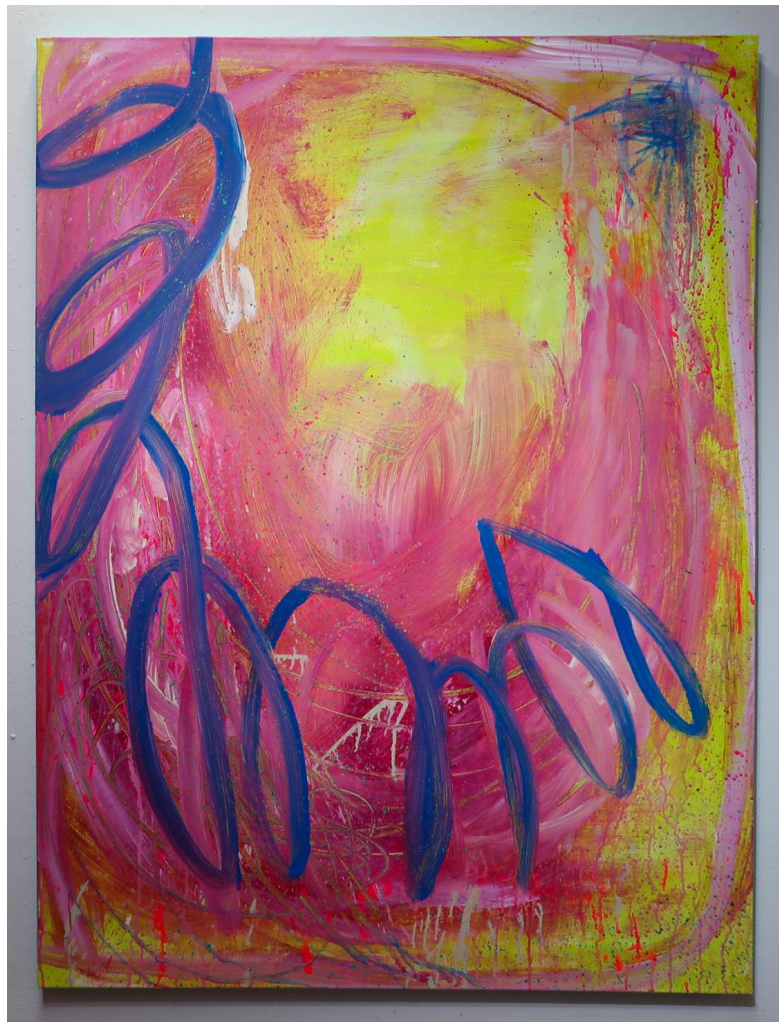
Please Don't Look Inside
12x12, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas



I Can Quit Whenever I Want
12x12, acrylic on canvas



Wait Up
36x36, oil and acrylic on canvas



Synchronized Swimming on Mars
36x48, oil and acrylic on canvas

An abstract painting featuring a textured background with vertical stripes in shades of green, blue, and pink. The stripes are interspersed with areas of mixed colors and brushstrokes. A white cursive text overlay is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

Research and Process

The Beginning

When I began this project, I knew exactly what I was setting out to create. I was so excited to finally have the opportunity to make the art that had been living in my head for years. This was finally my chance. The time to go forth and dive into abstraction, with nothing holding me back.

And so I did. I set off painting as soon as we got access to our studios. I was covering canvases in paint the first week. Nothing could hold back the energy I had stored up for years working on other projects that weren't this.



September 14th, 2022
First week of studio access

By the end of September, I was working with a ferocity I'd never before seen in myself. It was like I was finally unleashed.

I was staying late, getting in early, thrilled to finally be creating without limitations.



September 28th, 2022
Studio view

The First Crack

At the first check in of sorts, I was beaming with pride to show how many paintings I had made. My truest forms of expression had become actualized.

Very quickly I realized that no one had anything to say about the paintings. No one commented on anything about them. Instead, my motives were challenged. I didn't have enough research to back the works up, so they were written off. I was crushed. Devastated beyond words really. Here was this thing I had been dreaming of creating, and the works themselves didn't matter. It's like they weren't in the room. I thought it was my chance to finally create the work that I was passionate about. I felt like I had made a massive miscalculation about what IP was meant to be.



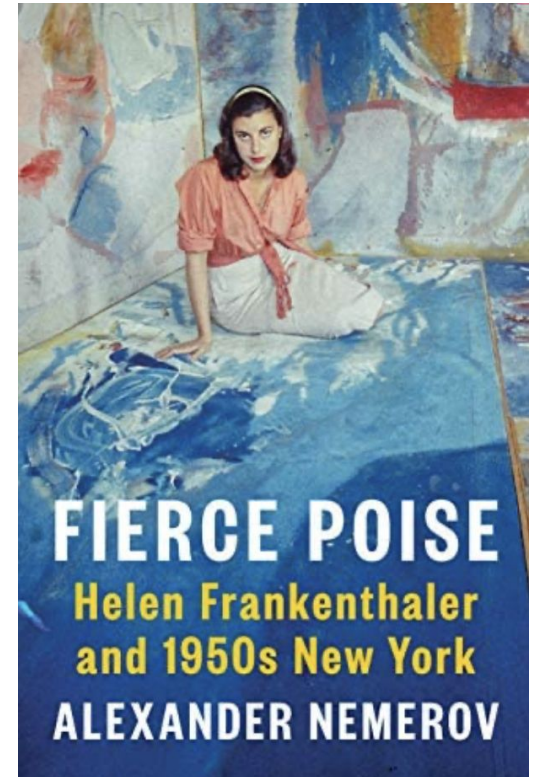
October 25th, 2022
Studio view

Resolve

But I was determined. I was set in my decision and I was going to spend this year making these paintings. I just had to discover why it was so important to me to do it. I went to the library. I read about art theory and the history of abstraction.

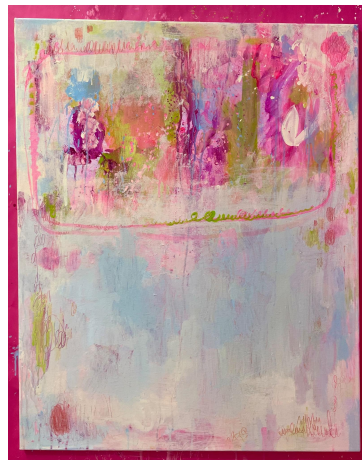
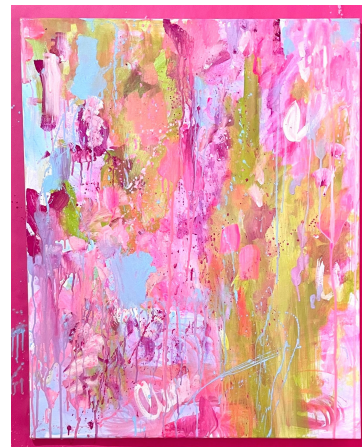
I came across Helen Frankenthaler. In the book *Fierce Poise*, she's quoted saying, "What concerns me when I work is not whether the picture is a landscape, or whether it's pastoral, or whether somebody will see a sunset in it. What concerns me is—did I make a beautiful picture?"

It was a lightbulb moment. Other painters had worked in this way before, so I could use this history as a way of providing validity to my own works.



Cover of *Fierce Poise: Helen Frankenthaler and 1950s New York*, 2021

So I continued working, determined to create the body of work I had set out to make originally. As I carried on, I realized how different I was from my peers, who were working on research projects that would result in art. I felt so different because I was working on art that needed research to support it. My work was informed by itself. I would come into the studio and look at the paintings and they would tell me the next step that was needed.



Progress shots of *Optimism*, 24x30.

That's when I discovered Stanley Whitney's artist talk about Joan Mitchell. In this, he discussing the formal qualities of Mitchell's work, while also including his own knowledge as an abstract painter. He describes that if you are a process painter, you really are listening to the painting as it comes together. Every mark that you make is informed by the mark you made previously.

This was an important moment in discovering myself as an artist. I am a process painter. I never knew there was a term for it, but it fits what I do perfectly.

I started to feel understood and less alone in my pursuit. I wasn't the first person to work this way. I'm not an anomaly. I think that in such a close-knit institutional place, it was really easy for me to feel alone. I wasn't working like everyone else around me, but that doesn't mean I wasn't working like others had before.



Artists on Artists: *Stanley Whitney on Joan Mitchell's Fearless Career and the Drama of Painting*



Joan Mitchell, *Wood, Wind, No Tuba*, 1979

And so I continued to research artists who had similar motives, hoping to create my own sense of community. I looked to artists like Cy Twombly, who I had admired for years.

In my research, I learned he would sometimes paint with the lights out to try and ignore anything he learned in art school. It felt like such a revelation to find artists who were trying to tap into the subconscious act of making. I found him to be less of an inspiration, and more of a companion. We were both two souls trying to make without the confines of meaning, just dumping energy onto canvases.



Cy Twombly, *Coronation of Sesostris (Part V)*, 2000.

Process

In my practice, I was always working on several paintings at a time. I began by covering canvases in color. I found this first stage to not be super crucial, so I tried to just begin without a lot of thinking. After I laid color down, I would move on. I'd begin another canvas and repeat and repeat this beginning. Once I'd started six or seven paintings, I was able to really begin.

I think I work like this as a way of staying busy and keeping my energy really active. If I am sitting and waiting for a canvas to dry, the energy of creating begins to decline.



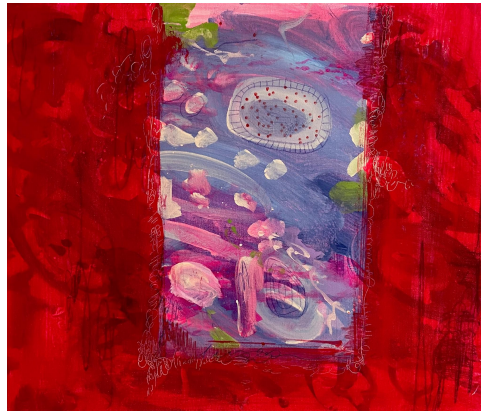
October 10th, 2022
Assortment of in progress paintings

Once I had a bunch of canvases started, I could dance. My hands already knew where we were going; it's second nature to them. We'd swirl and blend and blot and scrape and mix until hours have passed. Constantly moving in the studio—I'd zoom in so close to details that I'd get paint in my hair, and in the next second, I'd zip backwards across the room to see the difference from twenty feet away. Sometimes I'd squeeze the paint right out of the tube onto the canvas. At other moments, I'd just pour water right into the marks I'd just made. I was experimenting the entire time. I'd wonder what would happen if I did something, and before I could even take time to ponder it, I've done the action to the painting.



January 9th, 2022
Palette

My process happens really quickly. Usually layering and layering until I have gone way too far and the whole piece is a chaotic mess. I'd stare at it. I'd think, "what are the most interesting things happening here?" Then, I'd start hiding elements—covering them up with thin washes of paint. Allowing what happened on the canvas to still be known, but also making a declaration about what I've chosen to highlight.



In progress images of *Joann Fabric's is on Fire*, 11x17

The Breakdown

With the feedback I received, the new work I was making, and the research I now had to support my work; I felt so much more confident going into my pre-review. I showed the work and discussed my reasonings.

And yet again I felt like I wasn't explaining it right. My research wasn't enough to support the work. And no one wanted to discuss the paintings or the composition of them or my artistic choices. The paintings didn't matter.

It was then that I felt it had become a critique of myself. Because this wasn't a project, but a display of my own personal self. When people questioned the validity of it, they weren't saying the project *idea* was bad, but *I* was bad. And I don't fault anyone, because no one really understood that they were doing that. It's just that this body of work wasn't one singular idea that I had. It wasn't a research project. It was putting myself onto canvas—purely pouring my soul out, and so the criticism felt devastating.

Pressing On

At this moment, I could have easily changed my direction and worked on something that would have been more researchable. However, I started to realize that this project was more about my freedom than anything. I needed to make the declaration that I would do what I wanted and trust my instincts for the first time in my life. I wasn't going to do what was expected of me, despite how terrifying it felt. My entire life, all twenty years I have been going to school, I have followed the rules. I am a straight-A student, on a full ride scholarship. I have listened to the assignment requirements and followed them like the law my entire college career. This was the first time I felt I needed to break the rules. It was my last opportunity to do so.

My art has never been about pushing a narrative, or creating social commentary or change. Art that does is great, but in my own practice it has never come naturally. The art that I make is an escape from those things. It is the place where I can drown out the loudness and pain of the world around me. I can go into the studio and not have to think for a while. I decided I was just going to do it, press on, and ask forgiveness rather than permission.

So, I won't be providing academic sources from scholarly research articles to support this work. If I did that, I would be lying. I didn't use a single one to inform this body of work. I made the work. I came into the studio each day, picked up a paintbrush, and I was informed by the works themselves what the next step should be. I worked in washes and layers and built up thick coats and scraped through them with needles.

I read about artists who were like me, creating work for the joy of making, to feed that guttural need to get work out. I read after I made, to find understanding of why I was making. I had to. I had to pursue this in this way, or I would always look back with regret.

And I have no regrets. I am so incredibly proud of myself for creating this body of work—in the way that I needed to create it. I have discovered that I create work because there is a fire inside of me that can't help but to do so. I don't make it to push any narrative. I make it for myself, because it feels so good. My viewers are welcome to take what they want from it, but I put no expectations on them to find an understanding in the works. There *is* no set understanding of them; they are an experience I had at a single moment in time. They cannot be recreated, because I will never be at that moment in time again. The point of the work is the experience I had while making it and the experience of viewing it when it's complete. The experience can be anything.

Thank you's

I want to thank everyone that has supported me in this pursuit. Thank you to Jonathan, Sophia, and Leah, for pushing me in ways I never knew I needed. It made me into the artist I am at the end of this. Thank you to my mom for listening to me cry and lose my mind at times. Thank you to my dad for helping me build walls and french cleats and create the most perfect final exhibition. Thank you to Morgan and Anissa, for your constant support. And thank you to Shane, for always being my rock.



My dad, Joe LaLonde, hard at work.