

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

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THE SKIN SHE LIVES IN: JACKIE SACCOCCIO PAINTS BIG

Eleven Rivington (195 Chrystie Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan), through October 18

Van Doren Waxter (23 East 73rd Street, Upper East Side, Manhattan), through October 23

By Thomas Micchelli



Jackie Saccoccio, "Profile (Tumbleweed)" (2015), oil and mica on linen, 90 x 79 inches (all images via jackiesaccoccio.com)

To say that Jackie Saccoccio's big, drippy, radiant abstractions are all about surface — the skin of the paint — is to say everything and nothing about them. To visit her concurrent solo shows on the Upper and Lower East Side is to be bathed in light and color, immersed in the shameless joy of looking.

Saccoccio's work first caught my eye in a 2013 group exhibition called *Let's Get Physical*, curated by the painter Rick Briggs at Ventana 244 in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she showed a grid of four paintings in gouache and ink on yupo paper, dominated by drips and splatters and networks of bleeding color.

The drips, which headed in divergent directions and often hooked back upon themselves, were the product of repeated turns of the paper's orientation. One of the four pieces featured a kind of obliterating chaos in the

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center, a swirl of black, red and shoe-polish brown. That hole, if you want to call it that, takes center stage in the brush, new, spectacularly realized works that now fill — one could say overfill — Van Doren Waxter on East 73rd Street and Eleven Rivington's Chrystie Street location.

If the Abstract Expressionists sought to vanquish the focal points of traditional painting through a balanced fragmentation of the picture plane, Saccoccio does the opposite. Rather than rely on Cubist precedent and correlate the figure to the ground, she doubles down on her targeted point of interest, the center, and then does all she can to demolish it via a wholesale effusion of solvents.

This approach is especially apparent in the Eleven Rivington show, where the interiors of paintings like "Profile (Minter Meltdown)" (2015) (which is named, according to the exhibition's press release, for the painter Marilyn Minter) vaporize into veils of gradient color.

Most of the canvases at the Eleven Rivington space are vertical, but there are also two double-wide pictures, "Profile (Cop 663, Faye)" and "Profile (Pineapple, Cop 223)" (both 2015), which refer, again from the gallery statement, to characters from Wong Kar-Wai's 1994 film *Chungking Express*. These expansive works defeat the landscape and narrative associations of their format by presenting side-by-side circles (or near-circles) as they split apart like cells undergoing binary fission, or collide like errant planets, with hot jets of gas blasting into the surrounding space.



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The paintings in this show are notably scruffier, as if infused with a downtown Provisional/Casualist aesthetic, than those hanging at Van Doren Waxter. There are passages that may seem raw and unresolved compared with the more comprehensively worked-through canvases uptown, but the way the paintings are perceived is also a result of the way they are lit.

At Eleven Rivington, natural light filters in from the storefront window, but the lighting is primarily artificial, which throws wide reflections on the glossy, quasi-iridescent surfaces generated from the mica that the artist mixes into her paint. The refracted light, bouncing off the glittery silicate, creates ineffable layerings of space, where skeins of color seem to hover above the previously applied layers of paint, a softly sensual contrast that halts the the aggressive, creative-destructive momentum governing the painting's gestation, forcing an about-face in the character of the work.

The Van Doren Waxter show, which shares the title *Degree of Tilt* with the Eleven Rivington installment, consists of five vertical, identically-sized canvases (90 x 79 inches) on three walls, with a pair of French windows on the fourth admitting an abundance of natural light. These paintings absolutely sparkle in the wider spectrum of light. Small details, like the tiny knobs of yellow popping out of the mist in "Profile (Orb)" (2015), seem to blossom into revelations, enticing you to peer more deeply into the surface, as if the picture plane were an aerial view high above cirrus clouds, offering hazy glimpses of the Earth below.

In a painting like "Profile (Tumbleweed)" (2015), bright, flat, irregular shapes in red and blue crisscross a yellow and pink field like lethal traffic patterns. "Profile (Heartbeat)" (2015) unites a lopsided ultramarine lozenge on the right with an equally awkward form in warm, tar-like black on the left: two halves of a lumpen heart-shape (that looks more like a pair of lungs). The formal elements in these paintings, which seem to contain their own ecosystems and atmospheres, feel crisper, more graphic and high-contrast than their downtown counterparts.

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Jackie Saccoccio, "Profile (Heartbeat)" (2015), oil and mica on linen, 90 x 79 inches

The more refined painterly elements, or perhaps the gallery's location along Museum Mile, prompt thoughts of the work's art historical lineage, with associations going back to the circular organization of Morgan Russell's big, colorful "Synchrony in Orange: To Form" (1913-14), which was featured in *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925*, the dazzling 2012 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. There are also echoes of Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler, but Saccoccio's exploitation of every conceivable mode of applying paint to canvas simultaneously grounds the work in pure painting and distinguishes it as a post-painting phenomenon.

Saccoccio's go-for-broke, materials-based practice lands on the far side of the conceptual divide over the efficacy of painting in a wired culture. She literally pours everything she's got onto the surface, ensuring that the experience of her paintings — the prismatic shifts of light, the feathery strata of color — can be understood only by standing in front of them. Her work seeks a tenfold amplification of painting's inherent physical presence, a radical declaration of relevance for the fixed, unchanging object in space.

She's not the only artist on this track, of course, but the sheer complexity of the work, created through a controlled series of accidents, endows it with a kinship to natural processes, substantiating it as a shimmering alternate reality whose strength lies in its bonds with the flinty one we live in.