



Exploded Views

IN HER WILDLY ENERGETIC PAINTINGS, JACKIE SACCOCCIO CHANNELS THE SUB-LIMINITY OF OLD MASTERS AND THE CHAOS OF 21ST-CENTURY LIFE.

BY JOHN DORFMAN

Jackie Saccoccio, *Profile (Faceless)*, 2020, oil and mica on linen, 79 x 106 in.

IN THE ART of Jackie Saccoccio, it's as if the souls of the Baroque and Mannerism were reincarnated in an Abstract Expressionist body. The visual complexity and explosive paint handling of her oils on canvas, coupled with their size—larger than human scale, up to 11 by 8 feet—have an impact akin to that of an extravagant 17th-century building. In her *Portraits* series she pays homage to 16th- and 17th-century monumental portraits by artists such as Bernini and Velázquez, by depicting not actual persons but the impressions left in the artist's mind by the original works.

Saccoccio's engagement with these things began with a junior-year trip to Italy when she was a student at RISD in the early '80s. A Providence, R.I., native, she started studying architecture at the school before switching to painting. In Rome, she drank in the visual culture, outside museums as well as in. "That started a cycle of me returning to Italy," as she puts it, on short trips and fellowships, the culmination of which was winning the Rome Prize of the American Academy in 2004–05. "My original awakening," Saccoccio recalls, "was experiencing the explosive nature of Baroque

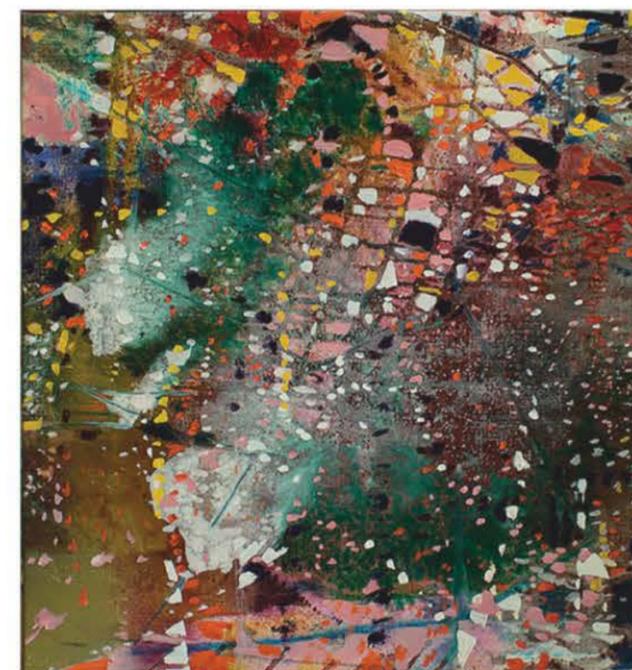


Clockwise from top left: *Portrait (Trickle)*, 2015, oil and mica on linen, 57 x 45 in.; *Tonal Eclipse*, 2019, oil and mica on linen, 79 x 65 in.; *Space*, 2020, oil, oil pastel, and mica on linen, 22 x 21.5 in.

art and architecture and how it was an exaggeration, taking elements of Renaissance hierarchy and spreading the eye across the façade instead of right through it, as in Renaissance architecture. In painting, I try to find a way of slowing the viewer down in order to experience a sort of psychological, rather than architectural, exterior and interior. Those are core elements I always go back to in my work."

The tension between exterior and interior, facade and depth, manifests itself in her paintings through a basic dichotomy between two kinds of paint application—pouring and mark-making. The poured paint spreads out of its own accord, driven by gravity and the contours of the canvas, whereas the marks are applied with a brush and reflect the intentionality of the artist. In her Connecticut studio, she says, "I start with pools of color and canvases on the floor, sometimes stretched, sometimes not. I build up 10 to 30 layers of paint, then I stretch them, go in and direct and enhance things that are already happening in the painting with brush marks. The pours are more ephemeral and atmospheric and otherworldly, while the marks have the muscularity and humanness, even clunkiness, that the elegance of the pour doesn't have."

The whole process, Saccoccio says, is improvisational in nature: "You do something, and it's looking pretty good, you leave it to dry, and the next day everything has pooled in the center of the painting. That creates its own set of problems, but I really like the



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Clockwise from top: *Apocalypse Confetti*, 2017, oil and mica on linen, 108 x 158 in.; *Tempest (Convex)*, 2019, oil and mica on linen, 130 x 94 in.; *Miranda*, 2019, oil and mica on linen, 79 x 65 in.



November 21, will be of smaller-scale works, ink drawings on yupo paper (a glossy synthetic paper), as well as paintings.

Another recent body of work takes its inspiration not from visual art but from literature—Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which happens to be from the same time period as Baroque art. Paintings with titles such as *Caliban*, *Miranda*, and *Cosmic Cave* evoke characters and locales from the play, whose themes include the landscape of the New World and the role of the artist as magician. In *Caliban*, she used oil pastel over the paint to create “kind of nonsensical boxes or cages” to give the impression of the monster's confinement. In her most



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recent works, Saccoccio often uses the words “concave” and “convex” in her titles, to suggest that the viewer pay attention to the dialectic between these complementary aspects. In her paintings, she manages to convey a dynamic depth of space without any illusionism.

Saccoccio describes her painting as chaotic and sees the complex layering of her paintings as relating to “the layering of different experiences to create a holistic experience” or even the psychological condition of “a society at odds with itself.” She embraces chaos even as she tries to

control it with the tools of an artist. In 2010, she curated a show at RISD titled “Collision,” in which she invited 17 artists—herself included—to choose and install their own work. In the brochure for the show, one of the artists, Doug Wada, responded to the experience of participating as follows: “I was surprised by the unfolding of meaning in both my own and others’ work in the context of the show. The layering of works creates a unique energy—simultaneously measured and spontaneous.” That sounds very much like a description of Saccoccio’s own work. 📖

Portrait (Nabokov), 2017, oil and mica on linen, 79 x 90 in.



Clockwise from top left: *Red Night*, 2019, oil on linen, 79 x 65 in.; *Portrait (Eclipse)*, 2013, oil and mica on linen, 106 x 79 in.; *Portrait (Bardo)*, 2018, oil on linen, 57 x 45 in.



Ab-Ex and Color Field are direct ancestors (she cites Helen Frankenthaler as an influence, though more from a technical point of view than an aesthetic one), but

Saccoccio sees a continuity in the American preoccupation with the landscape and nature. “The ruggedness of American painting is something I have always held very dear, and that includes Abstract Expressionism,” she says. In general, the programmatic references of Saccoccio’s paintings are not landscapes, but she did do one series titled *Places*—which she calls “somewhat

“Like her Baroque and Mannerist heroes, Saccoccio favors dramatic and even violent effects in her works. She uses the words “vertiginous” and “vortex” to describe the effect that she intends in her painting.”

anomalous for me”—that conveys the felt essence of various places she lived. Her *Portraits* are also autobiographical in the sense that they are about her own experience of the works that inspired them. “They started out as portraits of paintings, mostly Mannerist,” she says, “aspects such as palette or contrast between different things happening in paintings, interpreting them in contemporary ways. I was trying to capture some sort of essence or power of the painting and how that moved me.” The series she is currently working on, *Profiles*, “revisits some of the *Portraits*, with new layers of meaning,” she says. Her next exhibition, at The Club in Tokyo starting

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Le Puits Noir (Concave), 2019, oil and mica on linen, 79 x 65 in.

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