

13 Questions for Mara De Luca

By Tracey Harnish Thu, Apr 26, 2012



Did you draw when you were a kid/what age did you start?

As a child, I was a serious ballet student and never imagined I could draw or paint, in fact I was quite intimidated by the thought of it. I do remember being fascinated by the hand-painted backdrops and sets that were used for our ballet performances- by the way the enormous, rough gestures could, from a distance, magically transform into perfect illusions of trees, clouds, birds, etc. I finally took a mandatory elective art class as

a high school freshman and fell in love the first moment my brush touched canvas.

What has been your biggest sacrifice for art?

I prefer not to think of my work in terms of sacrifice, perhaps because I feel extremely lucky and am deeply grateful for every moment I am in my studio. I've been fortunate to have had the unwavering encouragement and support of my family, which has made things a lot easier.



What artists that aren't dead, influence you?

One painting that I've carried in my thoughts for several years is Rodney McMillian's "Supreme Court" painting from 2005. There's something exhilarating about the way he makes a brash pour of paint on raw canvas result in pictorial representation, heavily layered with conceptual meaning. The whole illusion hangs on a very thin but taut and resilient thread. I think about that kind of transformation (of process to content) a lot in my own work. I've also been looking at Joe Goode's "Torn Cloud" paintings from the early 70's, which have an almost opposite kind of effect: perfectly painted skies ruptured by gesture and the materiality of the canvas itself.

In terms of exceptional work ethic, dedication and drive, I'm most inspired by my friend and peer Helen DeSanctis, also a CalArts graduate and painter. She paints like her life depends on it, and her paintings are magnificent.

What artists that aren't dead, really bug you?

I must secretly admit, despite my appreciation for the theoretical and historical significance of the work, the passionate painter in me gets slightly irritated when viewing Baldessari's "Word Paintings",

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especially the ones that pointedly address (or dismiss!) the medium itself.

What do you listen to while you work?

It's easier for me to focus with silence. Usually, I'll put on music as a kind of comforting procrastination when I just can't get started.

What are you working on now?

At the moment, I'm working on a group of ten "Elegies" based on Rainer Maria Rilke's poems. Though the subject matter is profoundly existential, and the paintings are veering towards "expressive", the aesthetic strategies are derived from a somewhat more superficial source: high fashion billboard advertisement. I'm always interested in extracting and analyzing the visual effects and seduction of advertisement and media, which I view as a kind of contemporary sublime.



What was the last show you saw?

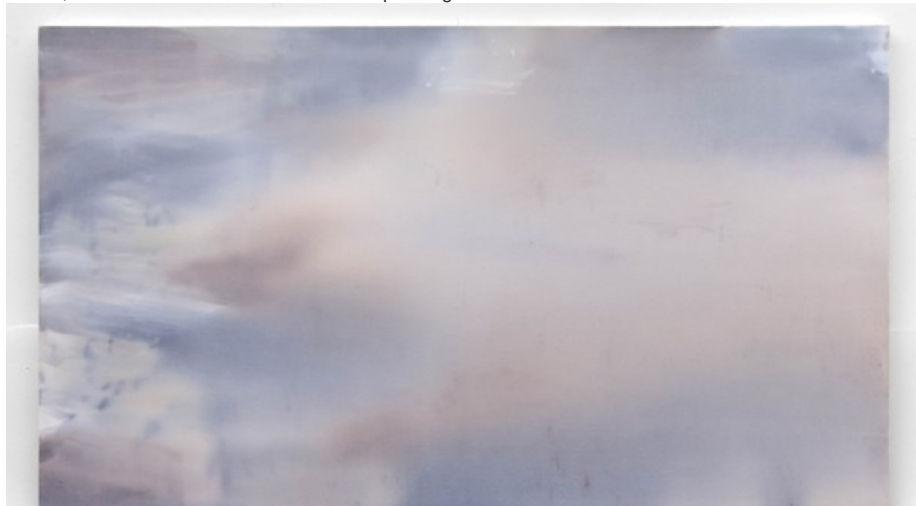
The last show I saw was of William Leavitt's new paintings at Margo Leavin. Their subtlety and originality blew me away. He effortlessly pulls off atmosphere and light with hardly any paint applied to the surface, like magic.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

It would be hard to make these paintings without my ladder. I turn the canvases on end and pour buckets of paint while perched on its top rung.

What is it that is spurring ideas for your work these days?

In addition to finding inspiration from literature, poetry and various forms of mass media, I am continuously in awe of the Los Angeles landscape. I love the city's dusk light and early night sky, and these atmospherics find their way into my paintings as a kind of setting for the more conceptual subject matter, which often has to do with how the paintings are made.



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How do local, national, and world events affect your work?

“Stations”, a project I exhibited at MCASD in 2010, is the most politically-motivated of my recent work. I made the paintings in response to the war in Iraq; specifically, I felt compelled to address the sensationalized delivery of war news on television and in Hollywood film. I did this through a kind of reverse-modernist strategy: in painting terms, a historically anti-propaganda approach intended to achieve pure abstraction. Instead, I had pours, stains and drips result in empty sensational effects and illusionism: these “*de-asserted*” picture planes were a political gesture expressed through the language of reconfigured painting convention.

What is the most important thing you attempt to do every day?

Besides painting, I consistently devote time and energy to maintaining emotional, mental and physical well-being. I do this through various practices, alternative and traditional.



What are you reading right now?

After four years, I'm almost through with Proust's "in Search of Lost Time", all 4300 pages of it. I'm also enjoying a collection of critical writing on Robert Ryman. In addition to Rilke, Proust and Yve-Alain Bois, I keep a few books on my nightstand that I hide when I have guests- books on creative visualization, spiritual abundance and the like.

What do you like to do when you aren't in the studio?

When I'm not in the studio, I'm either practicing yoga, walking in Griffith Park or shopping at Loehmann's.

Upcoming:

Artist-in-residence and project exhibition, "Elegies". Irvine Fine Arts Center, curated by Carl Berg. Spring 2013

Solo exhibition with Luis De Jesus Los Angeles. Spring 2013

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