

HOME

ARCHIVE

ABOUT/CONTACT

DONATE!

SUBSCRIBE

Search this website

SEARCH

**SQUARECYLINDER.com**  
northern california artEncode/Store/Retrieve  
OPENS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8COMING SOON! sjmusart.org  
**SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART**  
FREE for youth, students, + teachers with ID

INTERVIEWS

NEWS

PREVIEWS

PROFILES

REVIEWS

SPECIAL REPORTS

TOP STORIES

## Danielle Lawrence in Conversation

APRIL 23, 2020

*Editor's note: This interview, condensed for length, was taken from a virtual exhibition walkthrough at [Traywick Contemporary](#) on April 2, 2020.*



Sky Cathedral, Sally Ride, Metis and Déjà Vu, 2019, acrylic on canvas, stitched to constructed canvas, 86 x 96 inches.

**Stephanie Hanor:** Danielle, I just want to say congratulations on this show. You and I have known each other for 10 years, so it's been really fun to watch what you've been doing over that time. I was lucky to see this exhibition in person on the weekend that it opened.

**Danielle Lawrence:** Many thanks, Stephanie, for joining us in this new virtual environment. Since you've known me, I've been interested in the potential of painting as a shapeshifter. My work roots itself in experimentation and in the material possibilities of painting. I'm invested in reorganizing painting's traditional anatomy: the stretcher bars, canvas and paint. When we take a structure that has such a conventional history, and you rearrange those elements, you reveal flexibility, or a more malleable nature and expansiveness. All of which is extraordinarily important in this moment in time, when we're all dealing with so much uncertainty and also a need for flexibility.

The exhibition title, *Veils and Grids*, references shifting cultural perspectives as well. Veils historically relate to femme bodies: associated with mourning, weddings, covering or revealing an identity. Grids refer to structure, patriarchy, industrialism and modernity: how we map and navigate cities, how we build certain

structures. This work rearranges form, linear perspective and meaning.

**SH:** Your work has been formally driven with strong conceptual subtexts. With the formal concerns and the materiality of your practice, you're really an abstract artist, working with concrete ideas.

**DL:** While I think that I'm an abstract painter, on the surface, I'm mining very real and hence representational content. Do I think abstraction can be freeing? Absolutely. Representation and abstraction

are two sides of the same coin. They're different ways of organizing yet pull from the same mark-making philosophies — reflecting or mirroring back, the time in which they were made. Now, we're at a pivotal moment where all time exists simultaneously. (Thanks internet.)

**SH:** I was struck with this body of work as it reads much more as painting when you first see it, but once you get up to the surface you really see the structure of how it's made, the materiality with [sewn] collage and three-dimensional elements.



**Persephone, 2020,**  
acrylic and thread on canvas, 18.25 x 18.25 inches

**DL:** In past work, I have highlighted the dimensionality or materiality of paint, and used it as a sculptural element, taking away the canvas, exaggerating or elongating the frame to highlight the objecthood of painting. There's an energy or friction or vibration that happens when you mix representational and abstracted imagery, high and low materials, craft and ideas of fine art together. It's about a communal relationship between different materials, modalities and philosophies.

With this work, I'm really allowing materials to reveal themselves and for the construction to be its own thing – an accumulation or layering of experience and experimentation. I'm literally constructing the planes



**Uh Huh Her, 2020, denim, leather, canvas water color on wood, 31.5 x 25"**

of space – using torn and pieced together canvases — all of this gets hand sewn or collaged: repurposed materials, test strips for paint stains and ceramic tiles.

In *Uh HUH Her*, I'm using my black faded jeans. I'm talking about identity, working-class and punk rock aesthetics. So how do these jeans, as a material, take on all of that history?

In *Moon Garden in Ohio*, the grid made of sewn pieces of canvas could be an aerial view of agricultural fields or a network. The ceramic pieces on top could be artifacts or indicate a horizon – are they helpful in orienting oneself? Where's the ground, am I grounded or groundless? Questioning how we configure and navigate reality is central.

**SH:** So do you see your work as a form of activism?

**DL:** I'll say it in this way, the personal is political — I'll pull that feminist card from the late 60s and early 70s. I think that abstracted form has the potential to be experienced uniquely. It's individualistic.

I like to think about my work as aesthetic radicalism. Do I want to follow the same formula over and over again? Or am I really investing in the experimental and conceptual nature of paint and what it can do? What happens if Donald Judd was a hippie painter? What happens when we feminize the cube? What happens when we focus on hybrid or androgynous forms? A lot of what I'm thinking about in this work, and all the work that I've been doing for the last 10 years, is about painting as a vessel, as an organizational structure. And if we were to break down that structure, what we get is a re-orientation and an opportunity to review socialized ways of seeing and looking.

**SH:** Some of the titles reference notions of feminism. Can you address your use of titles in general and how their meanings are incorporated in your work?

**DL:** The largest piece in the show is titled: *Sky Cathedral, Sally Ride, Metis and Dejà Vú*, which is four titles in one because I'm talking about a layering of meaning and history, not only symbolically, but also manifested through the materials, construction and pictorial space. *Sky Cathedral* came from a Louise Nevelson work, so I'm referencing her and the way that she organized and structured space. *Sally Ride* was the first American female astronaut – how do women literally navigate space – and *Metis* is a winged goddess. She was Zeus' first wife and was both a threat and an aid. *Dejà Vú* is an album by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, which I grew up listening to – my mom is a hippie. *Dejà vú* is also the feeling that one has lived through the present moment before. The phrase translates as “already seen.”



Danielle Lawrence in her studio.

*Jezebel* and *Persephone*, are pieces that talk about the story of the stain — the bastardization and cultural formation of women's identity throughout time. My grandmother used to have a car that wouldn't start in the morning, and she called it Jezebel. So as a young kid, I had this name stuck in my head, and I thought Jezebel's got to be bad. And when we talk about Persephone, she is also somebody who is associated with shadow material, the underworld and transformation.

**SH:** Can you talk a little bit about work in terms of gender? And how you address an interstitial space for gender in this new body of work.

**DL:** When we talk about painting – as a patriarchal symbol – and it straddles all these other spheres of “women’s work,” like sewing or ceramics or handwork, then we’re talking about in between or interstitial spaces. My choice of the color purple is very specific: lavender is a mix of blue and pink. And it’s linked to queer color theory. Lavender is a color that’s in between, it’s not specifically male or female, but it has attributes of both.

I’m also interested in qualities of my work having symbiotic relationships – in which one element is not more dominant than the other. We could put that in terms of heteronormative gendering but don’t necessarily need to. Identity is not fixed but is complex, fluid and integrative.

**SH:** I think this body of work talks about fluidity in a really beautiful way. Can you talk a little bit more about the influence of music in this context?

**DL:** A lot of times people will come to my work and they’ll say, oh, wow, it looks so different. And the way that I like to explain that is: I’m the same band. It’s just a new album. I’m always working with the same concepts. They’re just taking on different configurations.

**SH:** I like the punk analogies and musical references. You’ve sited albums and lyrics before, so music seems to have a crucial role, not only to your process but to the final pieces too.

**DL:** I listen to a lot of music while making the work, so the lyrics become accumulations and where the layering of meaning starts to happen. In the piece *Uh Huh Her*, the title is a PJ Harvey album and song. PJ Harvey is, one of the fiercest artists out there. Talk about power. Talk about raw authenticity, talk about honesty, speaking truth in her experience. She is just as punk as Black Flag, only coming from a different perspective. The piece *Black Flag* references the punk band, but also pirate ships and funeral processions with black flags.

**SH:** Your work as a whole is complicated. There are lots of layers of material and meaning that are embedded.



**Eco Fem Zen Proto Punk Hippy, 2019, acrylic on canvas panels, stitched to canvas with ceramic objects, 68.5 x 60.25 inches**

**DL:** If you look at the piece *Eco Fem Zen Proto Punk Hippie*. Who am I? Where did all of my influences come from? I'm an eco-feminist and I meditate. I'm zen, punk and hippie. These works act as self-portraits of my accumulated experience, but my accumulation could also overlap with your accumulation. We are vessels just as much as painting is. And that's where the mirroring of art is so powerful — it's personal and collective. Specific and expansive.

# # #

Photos: John Janca courtesy of the artist and Traywick Contemporary.

**DONATE TO  
SQUARECYLINDER**

FILED UNDER: INTERVIEWS

2023/2024  
Exhibitions

manetti shrem museum

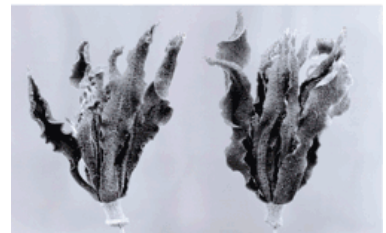
**CATHARINE  
CLARK  
GALLERY**

**/INTERSECTION**  
FOR THE ARTS

hosfelt  
gallery

*Crown  
Point  
Press*

**THE EDGE  
OF DAYS** | **CHU  
CHU**  
2023.11.07 - 2024.01.03





ANGLIN/TRIMBLE

DOLBY  
CHADWICK  
GALLERY

© 2024 Squarecylinder.com – Art Reviews | Art Museums | Art Gallery Listings Northern California.