

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Nothing Is Hidden and Everything Is Revealed

Rick Briggs March 27, 2012

The paintings of Lauren Luloff have always been as much concerned with finding the way of their making as they have been with the final result. This emphasis on an openness of process is at the core of everything she does. And over the years, it has resulted in a multitude of forms that have ranged from free-standing painting/sculpture hybrids to room-filling installations to rambunctious, constructed reliefs to the current incarnation of diminutive, relatively flat paintings with added collage elements. In these earlier works, the notion of a picture plane is exploded by her tendency to bunch material on the surface which somewhat recalls the work of Dona Nelson, and her funky constructions, which had something in common with the work of Chris Martin. Constants within her process are a fascination with transparency, the use of bed sheets as a working material, and an open, playfully additive process.



"Clouds And Conversation" (2011), oil, bleached bed sheets & fabric (via hortongallery.com)

The strength of Luloff's work has always been in her ambition and the freedom of her process. One drawback in the past, however, has been that the work has sometimes lacked a discernable structure. But something has changed. Luloff has increasingly been structuring with color and the results have been impressive.

The new paintings begin with a transparent silkscreen-like material which expose the stretcher bars as a base for her activity. To these, she glues cut pieces of decorative fabrics gleaned from second hand shops which have been drawn into with bleach, which in turn alters the color of the fabric. Thin washes of oil paint as well as the occasional splotch of opacity are added at any point but generally speaking, an effort is made to maintain as much transparency as possible. To quote the press release, "Nothing is hidden and everything is revealed."

This risky openness of process makes Luloff like the proverbial tight rope walker working without a net, or, rather, perhaps the "net" in this case, is her painting ground which happens to catch every small and large notation, drip and applique. Much to our delight. This transparency

lends the paintings an incredible lightness of being to which color is added sparingly and so deftly which, when you factor in her bleached fabrics, make her a kind of tie-dyed Henri Matisse. This sparing use of color is, to my eyes, a newfound welcome restraint making each color choice all the more precise and, at the same time, a counterweight to the freedom of process. And like Matisse, she is inspired by printed fabric but also the plants and foliage that inhabit her studio. In "Clouds and Conversation" (2011), for example, painted shapes and fabric cut-outs coexist harmoniously in a floating space. A large yellow triangular shape has a leaf pattern drawn onto it as it reaches to the top edge of the painting while other cut-out shapes themselves resemble leaves. Depicted and physical shapes gently jostle and nudge one another as they expand and reach for the painting's edge, much as a plant itself seeks the sun. A similar circular composition is found in "Golden Sky" (2011). Here the attached fabric shapes are more abstract but the bleach exacts dramatic changes in color. Ultramarine blue is turned a ruddy pink with stripes while a hunter green is changed to a bright yellow with dribbled bleach. Grey and blue cut shapes all float on a transparent amber ground. With titles that reference nature like the two above and with the lyrical, floating space, one can not help but think of early Helen Frankenthaler here, but on a much more intimate scale.

In other paintings, Luloff glues two different colored ground fabrics together. In "Turquoise Place" (2012), a turquoise ground is combined with a grayish ground and is comprised of three main shapes. A large navy blue shard with a bleached pink line that mimics a curved edge is continued with hot pink paint onto the turquoise ground. Below it, a light brown form with bleached yellow lines which refer to the woodgrain of the stretcher bar visible beneath anchors a similarly sized white shape that floats in the middle. Throughout the exhibition, there is a dialogue between the bleached and painted lines, as well as between the pre-existing decoration of the store bought material and the decoration applied by the artist.

What's remarkable about these paintings is not only the openness of Luloff's process but her faith at finding her way as she goes, where everything from the color to the shape to the texture to the material is "up in the air." How fitting for paintings exuding such buoyancy and grace!

*Lauren Luloff: Recent Small Works continues at Horton Gallery (504 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) until March 31.*



"Turquoise Place" (2012), oil, bleached bed sheets & fabric