

Ada Friedman and Liz Hirsch in Conversation

*Star* (Hassla Books, 2026)

### Figures

**LH: It feels only right to open with *Star*. She plays a big role here. How would you describe her presence? The photos I've seen of *Star* lying across your paintings, totally at ease, are so intimate (fig. 1). I'm thinking of Carolee Schneeman's relationship to Kitch, her cat of many years. She famously said: "The cat is my medium."<sup>1</sup> Is it like that for you? Is *Star* a part of your process, a collaborator, a witness, or even a conduit for the work?**

ABF: *Star* has been a constant alongside me for the last four years. Not that much else has. A friend recently called her half-studio assistant and half-muse. I liked that. There may be some embodiment going on, too. I relate to her unique attention patterns, delicate toughness, and prancing. She facilitates rest for us both. We are a joyful home for each other.

My choice to title the show *Star* was a move to help me feel supported, excited, and light about exhibition-making/logistics. The works in the show are a moment in time. A selection from my *Performance Proposal, Pathwork* (2021-ongoing) body of work (fig. 2). Last spring, when trying to think of a title, I remember not wanting it to be *Pathwork*, and I found the loose associations with *Star* (re: "Art Star") and the manifesting notion of calling paintings valuable, shiny, magical stars, amusing.

**LH: That makes sense. *Star* as the title does seem like a way of holding seriousness and lightness at the same time. But it's also both public and private; flirting with skill, visibility, even fame, and then this intimate level of companionship that isn't really for or about anybody else or their metrics.**

ABF: 100%. Also, I think in the back of my mind, I wanted to show appreciation for *Star*. Titling a show after her demonstrates how I like to celebrate friends and loved ones in my work. Plus, I'm making fun of myself a little for talking to and about my cat a lot.

**LH: The press release for this show describes your paintings as "calendars from out of time." I love that phrase. It suggests both devotion and suspension. How does time accumulate in your process?**

ABF: Time accumulates differently in different works. It is a material and a research interest to me.<sup>2</sup> The large, often double-sided *Performance Proposal* paintings can take years to complete

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<sup>1</sup> Carolee Schneemann, letter to Margaret Fisher, July 17, 1974, pub. in *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle*, ed. Kristine Stiles (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 218.

<sup>2</sup> Ada Friedman, artist statement, 2024: "Time is a core intellectual and creative interest of mine. Time as a creative device and the notion of time as non-linear and multi-directional motivate me. Researching different traditions in marking time thus works to decouple time from the Western-originated Gregorian

because of space and schedule restrictions. I'll work on a *Performance Proposal Drawing* prior to, alongside, and after completion of its connected painting (fig. 3).

For some of my *Everyday Drawings* (2017-ongoing) and for *Performance Proposal: Pathwork, Counting Days* pieces time's buildup is shown with repetitive diagonal slashes and tick-marks (fig. 4). These piles of painted and drawn lines correspond to studio sessions/days passing as well as my body pacing or dancing by or across the painting.

I am curious for you to elaborate on how you read into my paintings as "out of time" or that sentiment in general. A respected painter peer used that phrase to describe my paintings years ago. I remember cringing a little, not knowing how to take it.

**LH: "Out of time" makes me think of a calendar untethered from standard chronology, as if the work quietly rewrites its own history as it grows. Do you notice patterns emerging across the years that you didn't anticipate when you first started marking days?**

ABF: I didn't anticipate anything concrete when I started making drawings that also serve as calendars. In fact, I have an amped memory of the first time I gave myself permission to take seriously, as a drawing-in-itself, the ongoing hand-drawn-grid calendar that hung in my studio. I was working in my small, partial-walk-through, loft-apt-studio between Bushwick and Myrtle avenues, a year out of graduate school. I was giddy and relieved to realize and proclaim that this thing I was spending "too much time on" was actually the work. I was mentally adjusting or changing a studio rule so that what I was making could fit into my larger studio project framework. Making a tweak like this in a concept or structure of a work along the way is a fairly normal studio maneuver for me (fig. 5). My therapist mother says that flexibility is a sign of good mental health.

**LH: That's an interesting shift: what was a non-work, a life-thing, a kind of process-artifact, is now a work. I'm also thinking of the Mylar comma drawing hung inside the bookcase in the *Star* exhibition. The notes on it seem to trace your process as you gesture outward, hinting at symbolic connections we may or may not fully grasp. One reads: "Yellow Brick Road," and of course my son Jonas recently played the Yellow Brick Road in a Wizard of Oz adaptation at his elementary school, so I'm partial to it. But beyond that, it feels like a doorway into a Dorothy-like rabbit hole, a route through the work that's fantastical and navigational. This is about ruptures in the time-space, too. How do you see your notations operating? Anchoring, detouring, or something else entirely?**

ABF: Jonas as the Yellow Brick Road. I love it—animate bricks. Physically, writing and drawing are fairly interchangeable for me. So it makes sense that within the territory I create in my paintings, there are words woven within lines, dashes, piles of mush, etc. In the studio, I write on my paintings and drawings while I make them for concrete reasons, such as earmarking a

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calendar. Rituals such as parades, coming of age marker celebrations, and moon cycles, all fascinate me and may play a role in my process."

color placement idea, to pause a song lyric on repeat in my head, to remind me of the story/world I am creating, and or to encourage myself to keep going. Noting interior dialogue on a literal work while making is grounding. It helps me work. I often say to students, one of our main jobs in the studio is to find and develop ways to help ourselves work.

When my paintings and drawings are outside my studio, I like that notations, although they are often obscured or hidden in material layers, could open up my process to a viewer. It is a choice to let words hang out as they sometimes do. And if they don't serve the painting as a whole, the words have to go (like any other mark would). The notations are also a self-awareness move on my part. It would be cool for someone else to see them as operating that way. They hold clues to my process and the painting's stories, etc. I think my work rewards slow looking and an imaginative mind. Ultimately, how others read my notations is up to them.

**LH: The *Pathwork* paintings aggregate smaller units of paper, canvas, linen, and other materials to form a larger whole. But interestingly, I don't often hear you refer to the process of collage. And in fact, for your first show with Kendra, it was stated directly in the text that these works are not collages. Can you say more about that delineation?**

ABF: I relate to your phrasing, your identifying my paintings as being made by smaller parts meshing together into a larger mass. I think the way for me to address this question is to bring up my drive when making a painting towards wholeness, each work is a holistic object. For well over a decade, I have sought to make paintings that don't belabor or entertain a difference between "surface" and "substrate."

When writing about my work, I would never explicitly put 'collage' in the negative, as in saying that my work is not collage. I respect and relate to collage's history in art and its presence in everyday living too much. Plus my desire to show my studio process in a final work is in line with the collage mindset of putting two or more things together that may not belong. I leave or accentuate the seams from affixing paint and mediums with papers and fabrics to make my larger paintings. That said, I know what you mean. I also thought it was a curious choice of words and did not oppose the way the gallery positioned my paintings as "not collage" in their writing. Because I seek wholeness in and through them.

As a shorthand studio name, I call the different blue fabrics that make up *Performance Proposal*, *Pathwork: Ceiling 1, Floor 2*, "bricks." This speaks to the many small parts making up the greater whole.

**LH: We are back to the brick road! Let's also talk about gradation. In your works, we often see these shifting tonal ranges, such as a series of maroons or grays. The array of shades call to mind hardware store paint swatches. What do you think about gradation, even beyond the visual effect? Letting color shift gradually across a work; is this a way of marking time, too?**

ABF: Gradation is a great word! If we are on the same page about what you are referring to. An example is the deep dark blue oil paint rectangles in side B of *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Ceiling 1, Floor 2* (fig. 6), or the pink or brown areas on side A. Then the gradation happens as I evenly layer a mixed but consistent paint hue across different fabrics that make up the painting structurally. Materials such as a denim cutting from a retired favorite pair of jeans, my mom's discarded practice embroidery patches, or a collected, alluring patterned tablecloth scrap. I am making new, specific, and surprising colors and sheens by this application of paint on diverse, often already-worked materials.

It is a lovely observation, that my facilitating this kind of gradual shift in color (often made through a shift in texture/material), is a way I mark time across a painting. The assertion stands true for me. But the main impetus was to leverage my chosen materials to do the most work for me/the painting that they can. To use the particular tactile skins and already worked spots fully. Let their particularities be seen and shine through. This happens best and in a most chill and surprising way, I've learned, when I apply thin and even coats of the same paint on various grounds. It is very cool that it falls/absorbs/reads differently on each distinct part of the whole.

To remember different colors I can use, I record paint samples in a sketchbook and binder, and sometimes on drawings as I work. I also have a set of Color-aid papers and a collection of hardware store color swatches in the studio. My memory is such that it can be hard for me to call up a color without having cozy, tactile in-the-world references close by.

**LH: Thinking back to the Glasgow School of Art, where we met, I linger on the Mackintosh building, where we had our studios. The weight of all that brown wood, the way warm light moved across floors and spiraling stone staircases. I can't picture exactly where your studio was, but I can see mine, tucked on the second floor of that strangely quiet space. It's almost impossible for me to separate that memory of us from the architecture. Knowing now that the school has burned twice since, adds this heavy layer: a vivid memory of a lost place, living on in our imaginations.**

ABF: Awe yeah, that was a magical time. Glad it has woven its way into this conversation two decades later. I remember visiting you in your studio, maybe it was around a bend in the hallway, or on the floor below, perhaps your desk was at the room's entrance, facing away from the door? To get to my spot, I followed a winding path, turning several corners, around the studio nooks of peers. As you ascended, the building became darker and the ceiling height lowered. This was a psychological trick played by the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who wished to intimidate art students during their faculty reviews, which took place on the top floor. How the sky was always tinted purple, and your long, slightly puffy, turquoise jacket are two treasured texture-color images I hold from that chapter.

**LH: How do you know when a painting is finished?**

ABF: This year, I started calling the process of when I put myself up to finish a painting, "bringing the painting home." There is an element of letting go of the work when completing it. A

transformation of states. Returning the piece to, or adding the piece to, an ephemeral realm that is bigger than myself. The ether, the texture, that surrounds.

**LH: I really appreciate how you let the work go and live on in whatever new contextual manifestation it finds.**

ABF: Forever reaching towards self-awareness. I've noticed that I often complete a painting by doing a brash (scary) blocking-out or adding-to move. For example, a late-stage decision in creating *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Threshold 5, 2024-2025* (side B) was solidifying the darker blue frame-like portion around the central octagon (fig. 7). Long live the power of negative space! When I see and can step into a specific atmosphere, an architectural whole, then I know a work is beyond, is home, and is complete.

### Captions

Fig. 1. Studio view of *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Lost Highway 2*, Medina, Texas, 2025

Fig. 2. Studio view of *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Threshold 5*, Brooklyn, New York, 2024

Fig. 3. *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Wall 1, Drawing 1*, 2022-2023. India ink, gouache, acrylic, oil, colored pencil, pen, graphite, foil, lighting gel, marker, pastel on paper, 24 x 18 in.

Fig. 4. Detail of *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Counting Days 2*, 2024. Acrylic, graphite, colored pencil, pastel, grommets, acrylic medium, and Gudy on linen, 38 x 31 in.

Fig. 5. *Everyday Drawing, Calendar 10/22-3/23*, 2022-2025. Colored pencil, watercolor colored pencil, graphite, water soluble pastel, wax pastel, pen, marker, acrylic, mica, watercolor, photograph book-page from 1970s moon book, and Lincoln Center program cut-out on paper, 18 x 24 in.

Fig. 6. Side B of *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Ceiling 1, Floor 2*, 2021-2025, Oil, acrylic, watercolor, India ink, graphite, water soluble pastel, colored pencil, graphite, glassine, canvas, linen, collected fabrics, archival tissue paper, tin foil, cinefoil, Mylar, acrylic mediums, PVA size, mod podge matte, favorite old jeans, Roz's work dress and practice embroidery, and tin can lids, 54 x 97 in., Medina, Texas, 2025.

Fig. 7. *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Threshold 5*, 2024-2025. Oil, acrylic, water-soluble wax pastel, soft pastel, colored pencil, watercolor, watercolor pencil, graphite, pen, charcoal, India ink, glassine, tissue paper, linen, canvas, Mylar, acrylic mediums, PVA size, and grommets, 84 x 77 in. Installation view, Kendra Jayne Patrick, Bern, 2025.