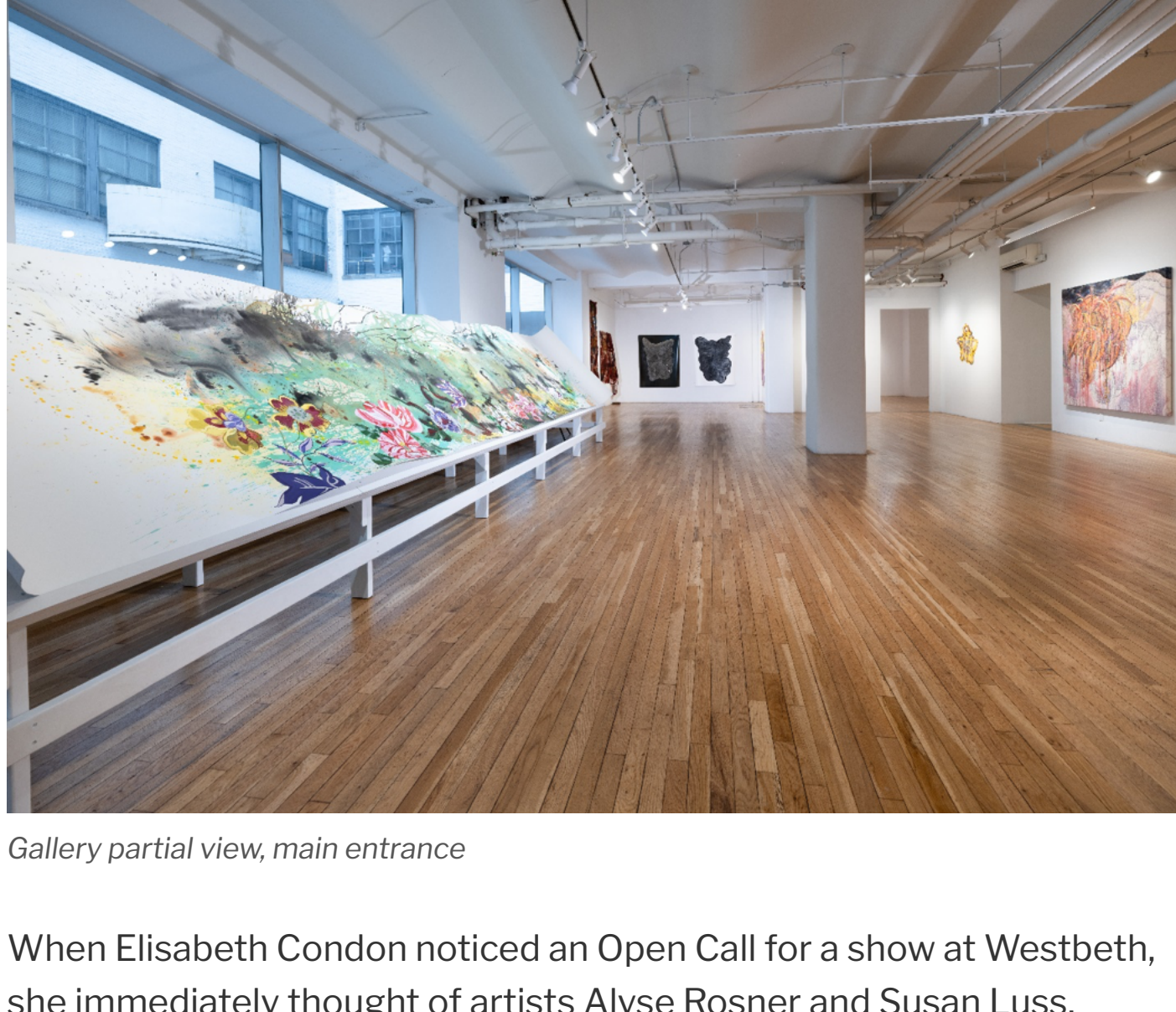


ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

APRIL 9, 2024 BY ETTY YANIV

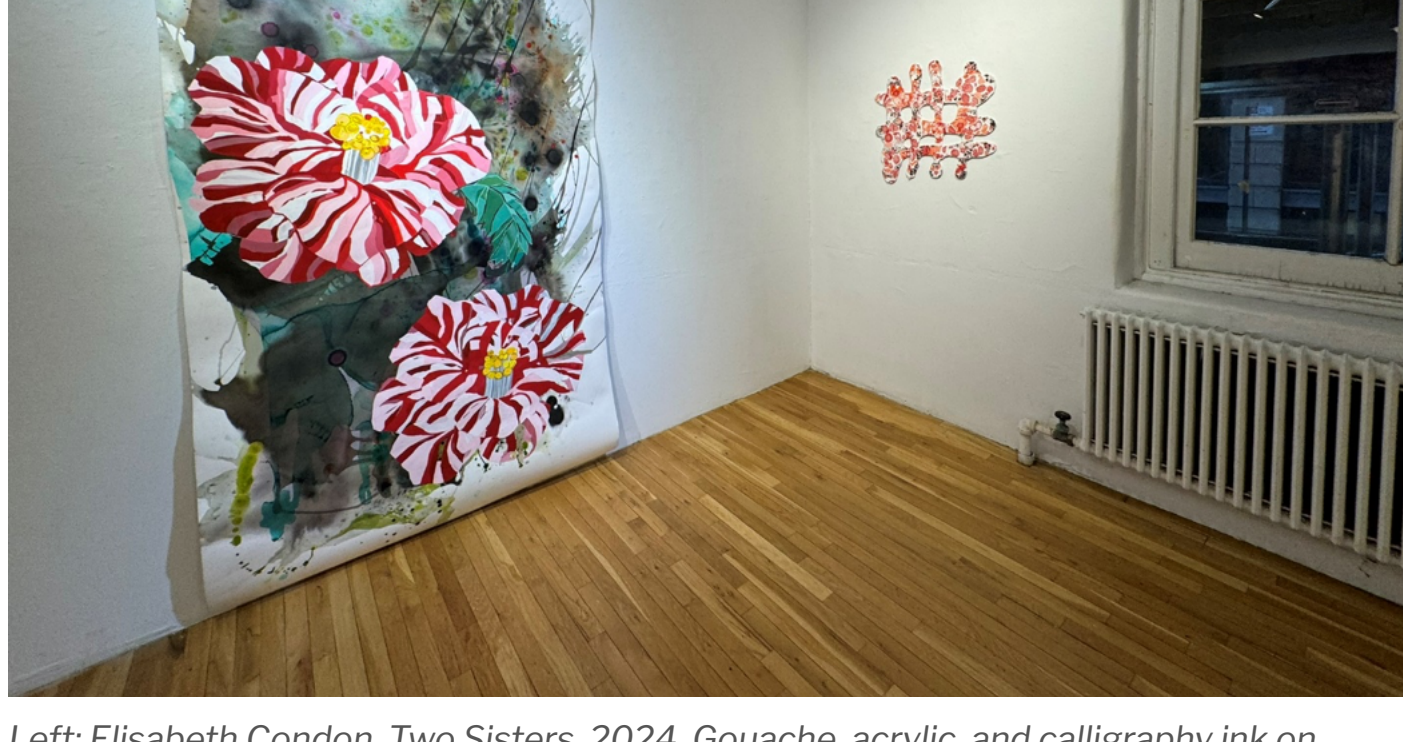
Mind Leaves Body at Westbeth



Gallery partial view, main entrance

When Elisabeth Condon noticed an Open Call for a show at Westbeth, she immediately thought of artists Alyse Rosner and Susan Luss, whose process-oriented approach perfectly matched her vision for a collaborative project. They all agreed to come together, planning to let the installation unfold over four days, allowing their work to merge and shape the exhibition dynamics. Their setup process—discussing, reshaping, and improvising in the gallery—revealed more profound interconnections. The trio’s improvisational method produced an exciting viewing experience analogous to a live jazz ensemble with distinct leitmotifs.

The featured scrolls, paintings, lattices, and sculptures abound with layered themes and stir our imagination with potent associations throughout the main gallery, the adjacent three rooms, and the nooks that give the large yet intimate Westbeth gallery its character. In his essay for *Mind Leaves Body*, Paul D’Agostino describes some of the artists’ shared thematic concerns as “broadly defined notions of landscape, understood as counterpoint or complement to urban settings, places of respite or remove from the valleys to the cosmos, or all-encompassing spaces of exteriority.” Additionally, the exhibition highlights the concept of *décor*—each artist engaging uniquely with this theme, further invigorating the dialogue between their works.



Left: Elisabeth Condon, *Two Sisters*, 2024, Gouache, acrylic, and calligraphy ink on Fabriano paper, 115 x 55 inches; Right: Elisabeth Condon, *Rosebud Lattice*, 2024, Poured polymer and acrylic on PVA, 25 x 25 inches, courtesy artist and Emerson Dorsch

In one corner of the gallery, Elisabeth Condon’s small-scale vivid *Lattice*, which references her mother’s 1974 *décor*, is displayed alongside a large-scale scroll depicting two gigantic red flowers—a floral motif resonating with textiles or napkins used in birthdays and funerals. Both works merge *décor* themes with the commemoration of life and death. Elisabeth Condon’s work in *Mind Leaves Body* was completed in 2024 during a six-week residency at the Joan Mitchell Center in New Orleans, LA. Condon’s connection to New Orleans and her recent mother’s death left their mark on her artwork. Condon seamlessly fuses these autobiographical family memories with local cultural sources, like the New Orleans processional tradition, into her distinct pictorial language.



Elisabeth Condon, *Lost Garden* 2024, Gouache, calligraphy ink, and acrylic on Fabriano paper, 55 x 264 inches, 56" x 264" support; Elise Wunderlich, courtesy artist and Emerson Dorsch

Lost Garden, a large-scale horizontal scroll depicting a row of intricate floral motifs, captures this New Orleans parade culture. It represents a step-by-step journey of life after death, of moving forward after loss. While each flower in this procession is unique, it also seems part of a pattern, like individuals within a community. There is tension between the gravitational pull downward at the floral bottom and the explosion of linear marks shooting upwards on top. These simultaneous vertical and horizontal movements are enclosed by the empty spaces at the two ends of the scroll—pressing in—creating a sense of halted movement in an unsettling landscape. Where from and where to—is this procession marching?



Elisabeth Condon, *Transporters*, 2023, reupholstered sitting chairs, wood extension, polymer medium lattice, 76h x 21w x 28d inches, Frederick Gayle, upholstery; Chris Webb, woodwork, courtesy artist and Emerson Dorsch

Combining poured polymers with patterned backgrounds, such as decorative wallpapers that echo traditional *décor*, signifies a new direction in Condon’s process. *Transporters*, the most sculptural work in Condon’s roster here, pushes further the entanglement of *décor*, life, and death. The two Victorian chairs, inherited from her grandmother, and then upholstered with unexpectedly loud pinkish fabric, are jolting. Yet, they make perfect sense with the translucent lattice climbing up a tall, absurd pergola that grows out of one of the chairs. The towering acrylic lattice echoes the floral motifs and the plastic covering of chairs to protect them from use. Here, the floral patterns encased in plastic become particularly poignant, their cheerful artifice frozen. Here, Condon’s play on life and death comes with a more pronounced dark humor, or even horror, under the vibrant decorative surface.



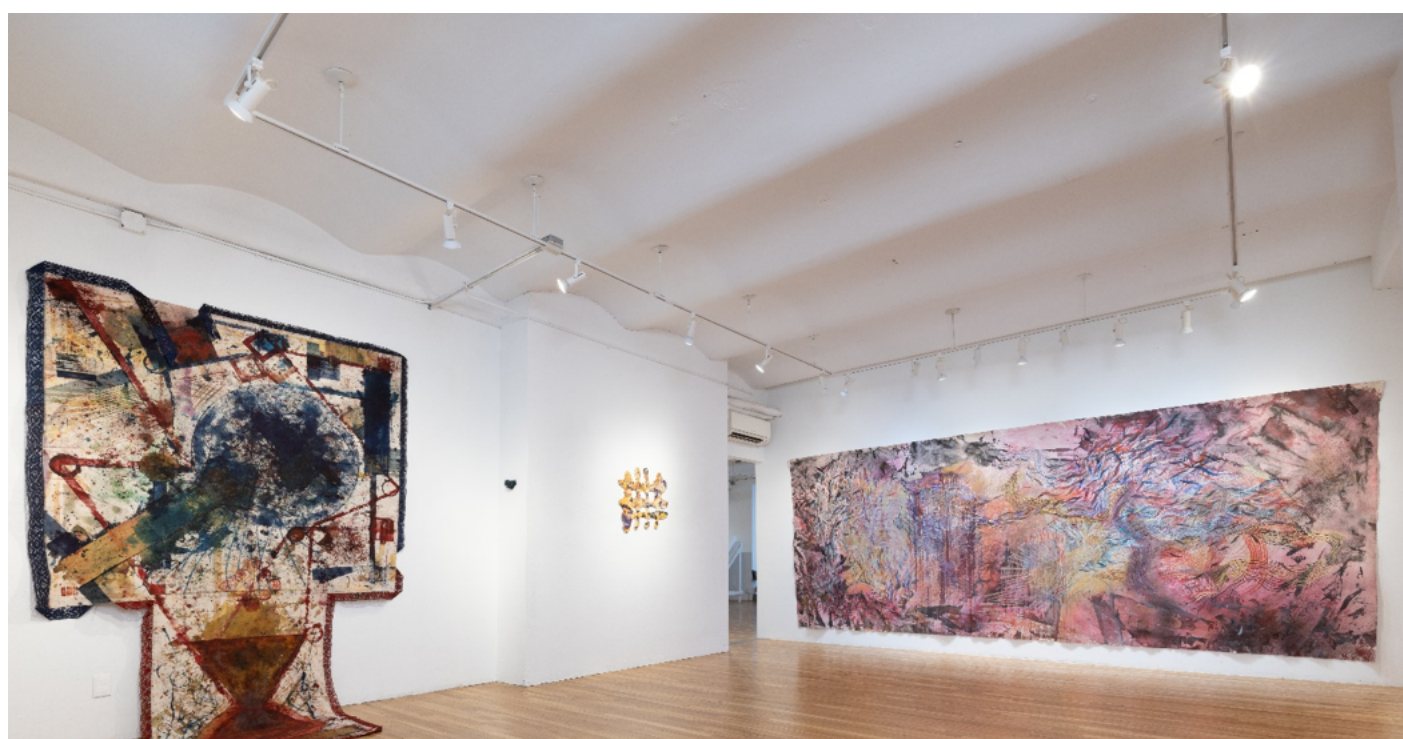
Back: Susan Luss, *Frequently the Woods Are Pink*, 2022, 120 x 360 inches, Canvas, dye; *Green Bundle*, 2022, size variable, Canvas, dye, ribbon; *Pink Bundle*, 2022, size variable, Canvas, dye, ribbon; Front: Elisabeth Condon, *Transporters*, courtesy artist and Emerson Dorsch

Nearby, Susan Luss’s large textile sprawls across the wall, in dialogue with Condon’s Victorian chairs. Towards one end, the wall-bound dyed fabric spills downward into a voluminous, lush drapery resembling a Victorian dress. The small red and yellow bundles wrapped in ribbons at the base of the wall are a delightful surprise. They echo Condon’s lattices—like an offering to her neighbor and us. The piece teases with its play of flat and dimensional, monumental and minute, painted and found.



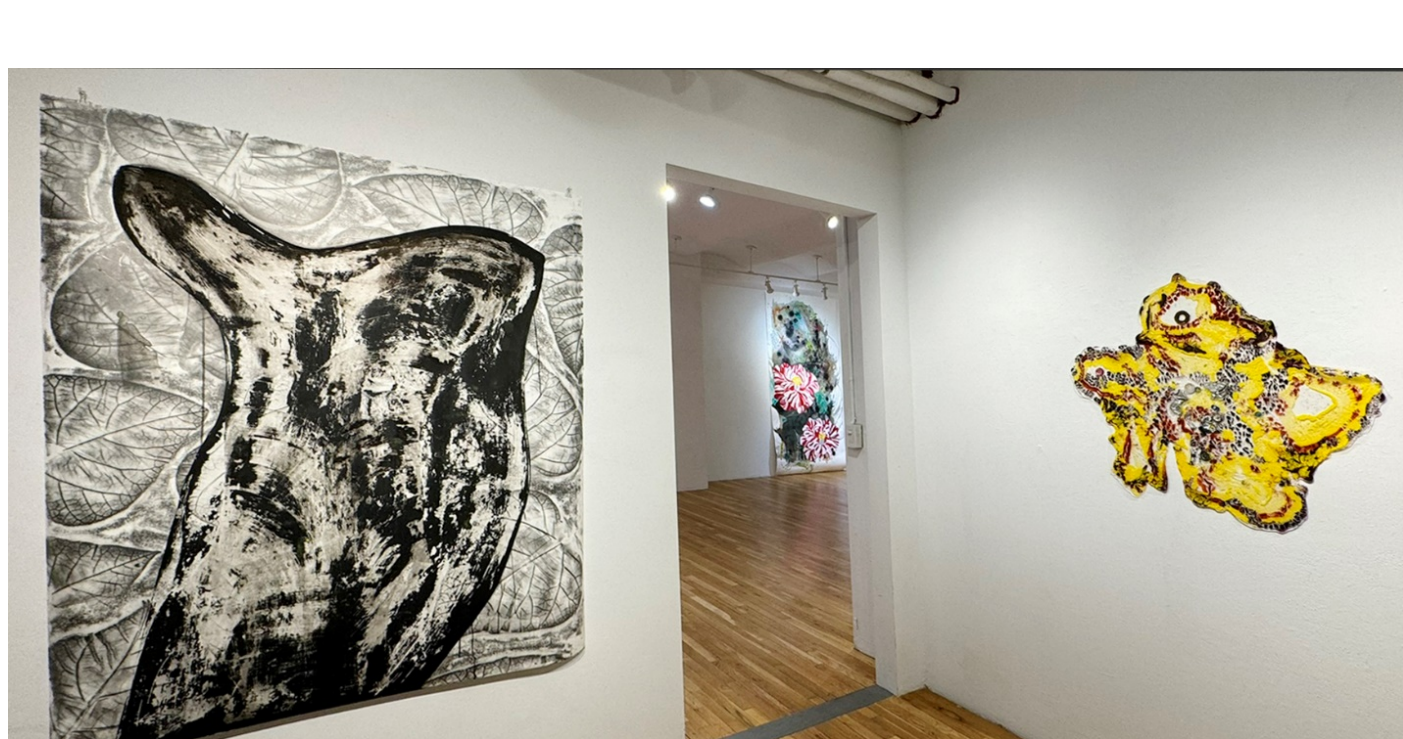
Front: Susan Luss, *A Stake In The Ground*, 2023, Canvas, dye, rust, 144 x 216 inches

Like Condon, Luss’s work is rooted in autobiography. In her expansive twelve-by-eighteen-foot piece, *Stake in the Ground*, displayed in the main gallery, she incorporates her ailing mother’s border lace remnants. The canvas is dominated by yellow circles, with a red triangle sharply intruding into the space. Diagonal lines crisscross the surface, interspersed with splatters of rust, creating an effect that resembles cosmic topography or a geological survey. Recently, Luss has started sewing, adding a more palpable sense of the body in her art, suggesting both the healing of wounds and the pain of piercing. Her process typically involves soaking materials in a dye bath, arranging them on the canvas as desired, and then pressing them with another object—a brick, a piece of wood, paper, or an additional canvas—using her body weight to facilitate the imprint. This method allows for a transformative ‘transference,’ forging new relationships and bonds between the materials. Her bold yet tentative dye transfers embody a union of deliberate action and chance.



Left: Susan Luss; Right: Alyse Rosner

Alyse Rosner’s paintings also result from rigorous physical action and use of found material, albeit quite different—rubbing from cross sections of tree trunks and giant leaves. She combines these rubbing configurations with vigorous washes of color as a starting point. Rosner’s range of color, scale, and experimentation with material is admirable. Her monochromes on Yupo, like *Empress*, are as engaging and richly colorful as her multi-colored paintings on raw canvas, like *Flare*.



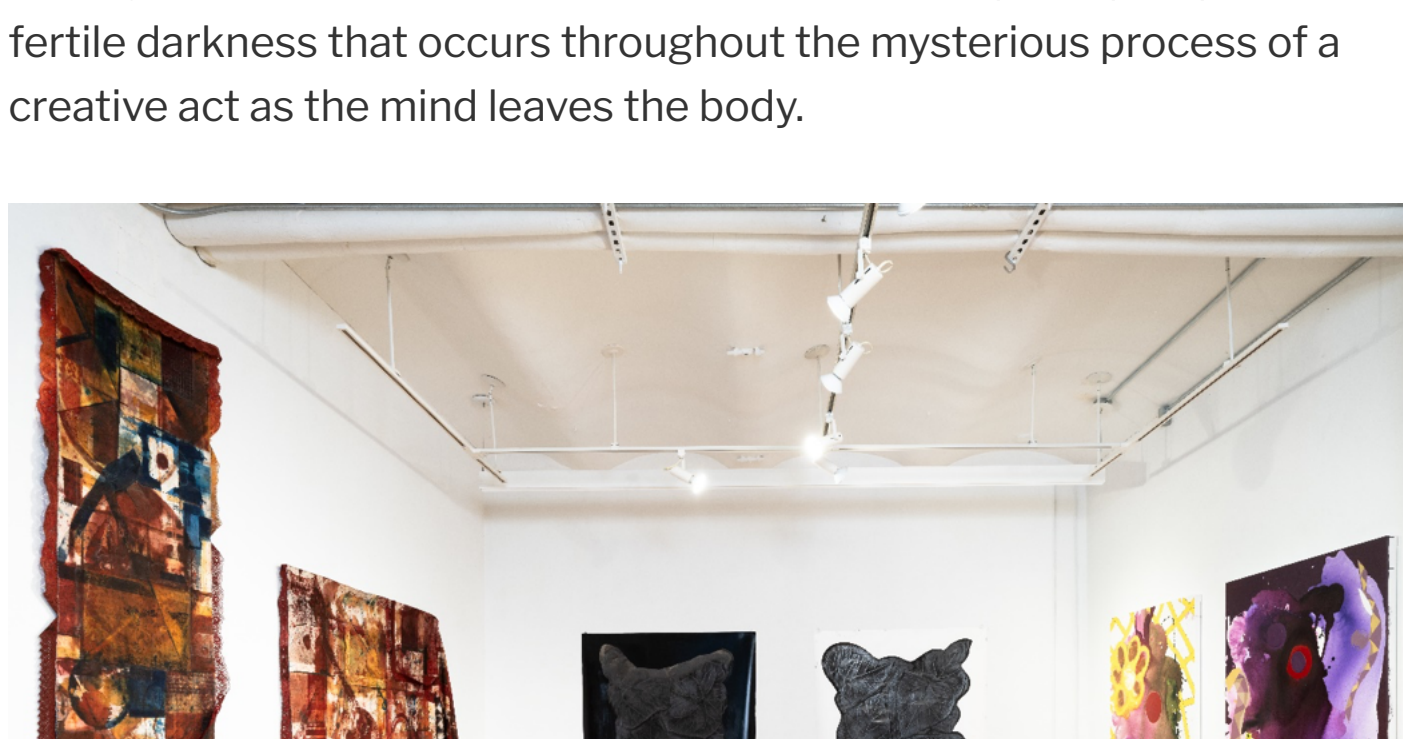
Left: Alyse Rosner, *Empress* (with figure), 2023, 60 x 48 inches, graphite and acrylic on Yupo; Right and back: Elisabeth Condon, courtesy artist and Emerson Dorsch



Alyse Rosner, *Flare*, 2024, 65 x 72 inches, graphite and acrylic on raw canvas

Both paintings depict a distinct shape in the foreground—a biomorphic form of a plant figure in *Empress* and eruptions of fireworks made of yellow, green, red, and violet stringed dots with curvy lines in *Flare*. The rubbing traces in both images create a sense of tactility that evokes strata or mysterious organic forms. The prominent black forms on the Yupo are made with rubbing from gigantic leaves of invasive species, reflecting shapes she has made over the past two decades.

As Rosner reflects on her overall body of work in the context of the other work in the show, she comes up with a counterintuitive observation: “The black and white work feels like a strong link to Susan and Elisabeth, perhaps for its grit, pattern, lushness, indulgence, the admission of subject matter, and the revealing darkness,” she says. You would think the more colorful paintings would be a natural link between the works, but ultimately, the darkness underneath the surface is the linking thread here. It is not darkness as in an abyss or cataclysm—there are some hints of that, too—but perhaps a primordial fertile darkness that occurs throughout the mysterious process of a creative act as the mind leaves the body.



Gallery view, left: Susan Luss; Middle: Alyse Rosner; Right: Elisabeth Condon

All photo courtesy of the artists unless otherwise indicated

Mind Leaves Body: Elisabeth Condon, Susan Luss, and Alyse Rosner at Westbeth Gallery 55 Bethune St., New York, NY10014. The show runs through April 21st, 2024, with a panel discussion on April 17th at 7 PM and a closing reception April 21st, 5-7 PM



EXHIBITION REVIEW

#ALYSEROSNER, #ARTSPIEL, #ELISABETHCONDON, #EXHIBITIONREVIEW, #PAULDAGOSTINO, #SUSNALUSS

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