

# Continuity, connection mark Irene Lipton's artistic journey

By Susan Rand Brown  
BANNER CORRESPONDENT

For painter Irene Lipton, the small stretch of cottages, dunes and sea that is Provincetown was always home. Even before she and her sister, Jackie, also an abstract painter, were born in the '50s, during the height of abstract expressionism, her parents were part of a circle of like-minded writers and visual artists wintering in New York and returning each summer (her mother, playwright Helen Duberstein, still spends part of the year in town).

Lipton's upcoming exhibition, opening 7 to 10 p.m. Friday, Aug. 12, at ArtStrand, 494 Commercial St. (at the corner of Howland Street), is shared with gallery members Bailey Bob Bailey and Paul Bowen. Lipton's work combines curving, overlapping and nesting forms, colors and line with a sense of playfulness — a sudden burst of light



PHOTO SUSAN RAND BROWN

Irene Lipton will exhibit new work at ArtStrand this week.

and air, like throwing open the curtains on a summer morning. Sculptors Bailey and Bowen blend elements of recycled organic and manufactured materials, employing processes like painting and collage, carving and carpentry. There is a dynamic interplay among them, as

friends and as artists whose work suggests numerous affinities.

To Lipton, having a studio — that is, being free to paint — is all-important. The mid-career artist had her own NYC studio beginning as a teen. One memorable space was an airy loft with cheap rent on the Lower East

Side: it's where she painted as a Hunter College graduate student. She had a studio at FAWC when she was a two-year fellow in the late 1980s, then another in the center of Provincetown with a view of the bay. To support herself, she moved back to Brooklyn in the early 1990s, and eventually returned with her husband, the photographer Phil Smith, buying a house on upper Pearl Street, directly across the street from FAWC.

The house was long on charm, but lacked a space for studios; reluctantly, she moved up the road, to a shingled Cape on a large lot in North Truro, not far from Provincetown. When Lipton could finally build the studio of her dreams, the pieces came together.

"I had just built this studio," she says, looking up at a high ceiling with skylights and around to large windows overlooking a spray of summer blossoms, "when ArtStrand got started [in 2004-5] and I was asked by friends to join." This meant she would be showing every year: it also meant continuity within a circle of friends who live locally, and who share values about the necessity of art-making even in the face of financial disincentives. Not long after, she and longtime friend Polly Burnell were honored with a two-person exhibit at the

Provincetown Art Association and Museum.

As she pulls from a recognizable vocabulary of interwoven, biomorphic shapes, Lipton's work, too, gains depth from continuity. She loves to draw, and line remains paramount in her work. "I always loved line," she says. "I do that little thing in my head that Paul Klee said: 'taking a line for a walk.' It's what I've always been doing. Whether I'm leading it, or it's leading me — I've been walking around with it."

Taking a deep breath on this early August afternoon, she thinks of another change that marks this abstract painter as not that far removed from the figurative tradition of Hawthorne and Hofmann: a powerful response to the Cape light. "I used to work very late, when it was quiet; then, over time, with this studio, and the whole Cape light, I began to paint during the day. Now my best painting time is when I first get up."

With that, Lipton has shared enough: daughter of writers who came and stayed, you could say she was born into this arts colony that continues to thrive because she and others replenish the cornucopia of light they — and art history — inherited.

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