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Ian Harvey @ JayJay

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by [Julia Couzens](#)



No. 162 (woman), 2017, ink, acrylic, enamel, oil, oil pastel and shellac on mulberry paper (three panels), 74.5 x 112.5 inches

The resplendent physicality of Ian Harvey's multi-layered paintings calls up unfolding worlds, geometries and endless allusions to organic form. His unremittingly tactile painting, promiscuously laden with pours, drips, blots, scrubblings and striations, tears the skin off our increasingly simulated world to expose the endangered states of engrossing wonder and awe. The works are spectacles of convulsive abundance, conjured with ink, acrylic, enamel, oil, oil pastel, gouache, and shellac on paper and wood panels.

Harvey speaks of his painting as a vehicle of inquiry and a means by which he can engage viewers in his speculative experience of the present. Embracing diverse, even oppositional pictorial languages, Harvey orchestrates what he calls a "precarious equilibrium," whereby he allows collisions of paint's myriad behaviors to determine content. His work, which bears faint resemblances to that of the near-visionary painter Steve Rodin, has much in common with speculative philosophy and the chemical science of alchemy. The works are paradigms of transmutation and a fresh description of synthesized nature, switching back and forth between

allusions to cosmic vastness and the subatomic. Painting, for Harvey, is an act of fierce resistance to the banality spewed by corporate media, a provisional barricade against life-negating forces.

The seven works on view, made between 2012 and 2018, are comprised of paper or wood panels on which he paints large and sometimes monumental works that hover between abstraction and representation. Motifs painted as recognizable grids or box shapes are juxtaposed with looping, congealing and spiraling forms brimming with evocations of microbial or celestial life. *Lantern* (2017) shifts from a migrating paint pour into flatly painted geometric modules and ascending amoeba-like cellular structures. These spatial shifts evoke cosmic wormholes and the extreme distortions

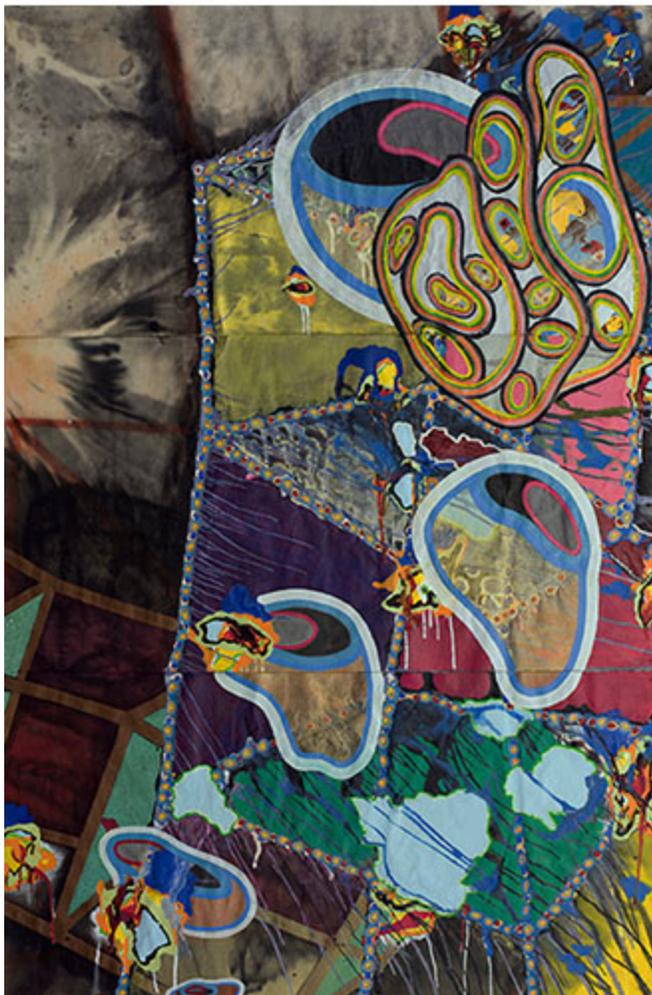


engendered by space-time travel. The sprawling interior space of it feels vast and deep.

No. 166 (rain), 2017, ink, acrylic, enamel, oil, oil pastel and shellac on mulberry paper (three panels), 112.5 x 74.5 inches

Jacob's Ladder (2017) unleashes all the potential that Harvey's oeuvre holds for addressing contemporary questions about the role and craft of painting. Crisply delineated black, pale blue and white stripes point to architectural scaffoldings and box-like forms that feel shoved-in, like doorstops slowing the free fall of pulsating organisms described in glossy ochre, sienna, cadmium red and cobalt blue.

The resolutely abstract *Rain* (2017) ekes out detail through the accretion of small blots dotting the coiling spiral and linear trajectories staking out the work's geography. Here, Harvey manipulates paint as if deploying rule-based systems. This lends the work a scientific quality,



reifying the work's nonmaterial qualities in murky green linear loops that appear to pirouette through time in perfect synchronicity.

It's not possible to contemplate Harvey's painting without thinking about the performance aspects involved. Meticulously layering thick daubs over abundant spews of watery paint, Harvey distills repetitive gestures into what amount to meditative acts. It's conceivable that he is frequently outfoxed by the random acts of chance that have long been fundamental to his process. This apparent non-judgmental attention to the myriad behaviors of his materials defines the "collaborative" qualities of these paintings-as-performances. The accumulation of painterly

No. 163 (lantern), 2017, ink, acrylic, enamel, oil, oil pastel and shellac on mulberry paper (three panels), 112.5 x 74.5 inches

phenomena – in pours, geometric shapes, nonobjective fragments and allusions to natural forces — is at once assiduous and abidingly ambiguous.

Harvey is also acutely attuned to the resonance of pigments and he deploys them to evoke a sense of pulsating life. The tactility of *Valentine*, 2012, for example, features animate roiling forms that appear to coalesce all at once. The work doesn't merely portray nature; it seems to be part of nature. It speaks of life and of the potential for infinite regeneration, which, in these bitterly fractious times, feels like hope.

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Ian Harvey: "Where Hallucinations are Important Questions" @ [JayJay Gallery](#) through October 26, 2019.

About the Author:

[Julia Couzens](#) is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at Patricia Sweetow Gallery. Her work has been recognized with a Louis Comfort Tiffany Fellowship and is held in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina; and Yale University Art Gallery. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.

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