

TAYO HEUSER'S SPIRITUAL FORCE

LOOKING IN: LOOKING OUT IN JAMESTOWN

In conversation at her Pawtucket studio, Tayo Heuser described herself as shy; to discuss her as a person with a countenance of introspection seems more accurate. The assessment of herself was enigmatic and thought-provoking, juxtaposed against the array of emotive abstractions which blanketed nearly all of the walls and available table surfaces around her that day, as she prepared for "Looking In: Looking Out," her solo exhibition that opened September 1 at the Jamestown Arts Center.

Her reductive sensibility engages the idea of spirituality in art. Heuser's work transcends the feeling of being in the "now," directing attention toward the ineffable beyond. While putting last details on pieces to be included in the show, she discussed Jamestown's exhibit space. She spoke about the set-up she envisioned to engage the white cube architectural format in a way that would become immersive.

Focused quietude roots Heuser's reductive investigations that are explorations of interiority. Silence frames the core of her creative ethos and contributes to projecting the expansive feeling of space in her work.

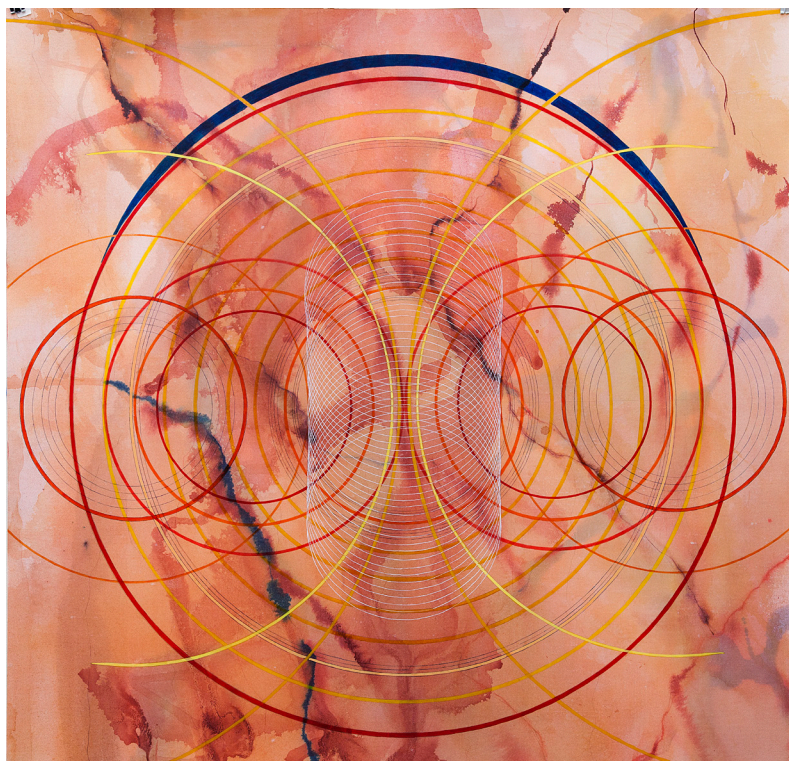
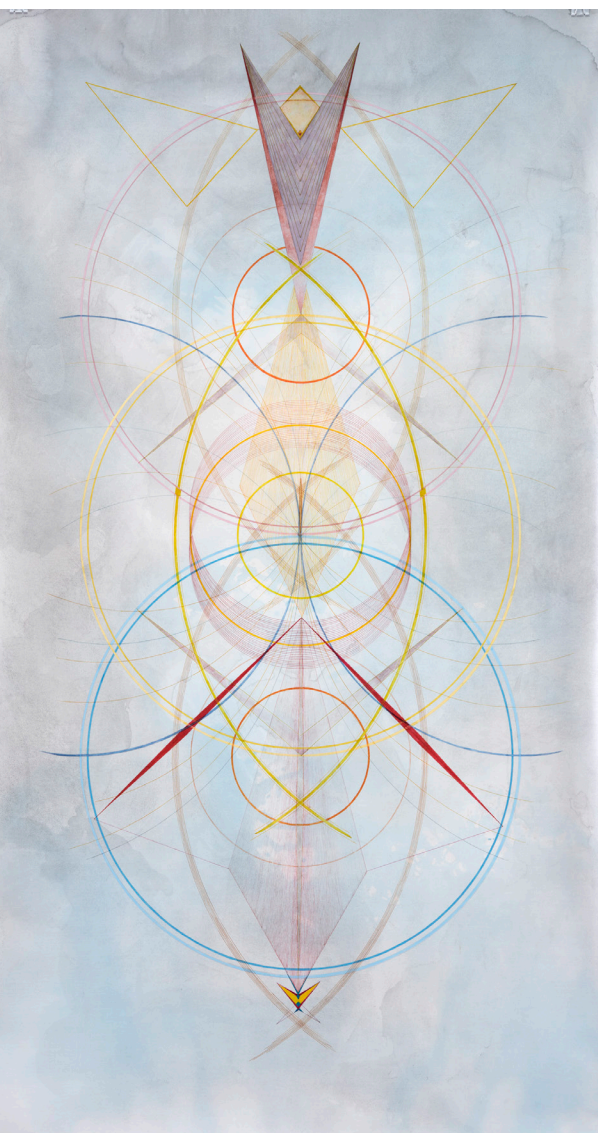
Process is an important feature of what Heuser is doing, and method texturally informs her work. Whether burnished smooth or fluffy in surface, her pieces ply geometric relationships to transform their physicality into works of imbedded spiritual force. The

artist's large, flat, burnished works on paper, paintings on wood and soft caste-paper reliefs represent specific areas of investigation. Brought together for the Jamestown show, the impression will be a spatial reasoning where works organically coalesce into a conceptual whole.

Ingrained into Heuser and her work is a kind of nomadic agility. Reflected in her life experience is a sense of identity internalized and intimately felt. Her work reflects a mingling of influences in relation to the global culture of today. Her abstract vocabulary is filled with layered effects. The visual information she presents suggests primitive ceremonial motifs. It is influenced by Islamic calligraphy and has background space with inflections of Tiepolo and Turner in the handing of spatial atmosphere.

Heuser's father was a United States diplomat. Her visual language links to non-western visual ordering, which she absorbed while being raised on the African continent in Tunisia, Libya,

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LEFT: *Dorgi*, 2015, inks on hand burnished paper, 80" x 42".

RIGHT: *Foramen*, 2016, inks on hand burnished paper, 42" x 41".

the Sudan and the Ivory Coast where she attended French-speaking schools and learned calligraphy of the Arabic language. Although born in Washington, D.C., the United States really didn't factor into her art experience until she arrived at Rhode Island School of Design as a student. Before that, she had very minimal direct experience with America.

Heuser is now certainly meshed into American culture. She teaches drawing at Roger Williams College in Bristol, R.I., and has an active international art career. Narragansett, R.I. was home for a number of years. Now she and her husband live in Providence, surrounded by an array of artifacts her husband collects with a passion.

Audiences who see Heuser's show at Jamestown Arts Center will see her caste paper "Window" reliefs, which are an ordering of information reminiscent of Mondrian. Her attention to process and soft coloration with this work also makes a nod to Robert Ryman's aesthetic. The artist made and caste her own paper for these reliefs and she inlaid them with linear makings of color so that paper, drawing and object became one. Dieu Donné Paper Mill in New York City, where she previously had a residency, allowed her to return for the making of "Windows."

"Foramen" is a work on paper with mesmerizing line effects and conjured space with forms riding above the background; it communicates undulation. The effects will remind audiences of art by early modernists. A conceptual interest of Heuser's is the idea of creating and envisioning portals as openings in space, and she sees these works as releasing the conscious mind into dream space. Heuser's interest in this regard connects with such things as astronomy, with genesis in the Arab world.

She describes the foramen as "the bony bottom archway created by pedicals of adjacent vertebrae that form a passageway through which all spinal nerves run. From this opening nerve transmission travels to organs, muscles and sensory structures of the body." She says that in terms of anatomy a foramen is a description that refers to any opening.

In Heuser's work there is usually a feeling of infinite background upon which geometric elements balance. The spatial reasoning of geometry always informs her pictorial fields. The artist's works on paper are typified by a hard burnished coating, a traditional treatment adapted from Ottoman calligraphic painting. The technique allows her inks to sit on the prepared backgrounds, increasing a sense of perceptual float. Tayo's "Untitled" painting series in this show includes enhanced wood grain effects as part of compositions. Molded paper reliefs by the artist are delicate, and their visual tension engages the shadows created by the forms.

In Jamestown, a series of same-sized works (42" x 41") will stretch across one wall. Multiple untitled "Window" reliefs will ladder upward on another wall. A whimsical three-dimensional arrangement of molded flocked paper works is expected to populate a different area of the same expanse.

On an opposite wall, audiences will encounter a suite of long oriental carpet-like works-on-paper, each measuring 80" x 42". An entry gallery, really a cameo space, is where Heuser will present a selection of small paintings averaging 18 1/2" x 14 1/2". Some of these have areas of gold adornment as a discrete, somewhat sexualized, embellishment. Not shy at all.

| Suzanne Volmer

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