

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

New
American
Paintings

In The Studio: Laurel Sparks

Evan Garza

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Godstar, 2010 | Mixed media on canvas, 48 x 36 inches

Clinton Hill, Brooklyn-based artist Laurel Sparks makes paintings that appear to shimmer and decay simultaneously, covering her canvases with rich, colorful textures which abstract drawn images bred from photographs. Featured in the 2010 DeCordova Biennial, organized by DeCordova Assistant Curator Dina Deutsch, Sparks's forms seem both organic and man-made, breaking apart and obscuring images of glamor until they exist only as layers of color, form, and texture. We caught up with the artist last week to talk about her work.

EJG: Tell me about what's going on in your studio right now. **LS:** I started off the year working on a new series of paintings called *Carnival Ecstasy* (named after an influential pansexual orgy scene from Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures*). The past few months I have been focused on a large series of collage drawings on paper. This work emerged out of my sketchbook practice, which is how I develop imagery for paintings. The collages have a different sensibility from my large paintings because they are more graphic and precise. I am still working with movement and distortion, but instead of pouring and smearing paint, I carefully fuse cut paper and small objects to 19"x13" drawings.

EJG: How exactly do you work in the studio? **LS:** My studio set-up tends to be obsessively organized and neat so there is plenty of mental space to improvise with my work. I keep all my tools and paints lined up so that I can make decisions spontaneously and know exactly where to reach when I need a material. Once I am in the thick of working, I can let things fall apart around me. I don't care. But if I get stuck or frustrated I have to clean up and start over. It's a totally cultivated strategy. I was never this tidy growing up.

Music is a major component to my studio practice. I mostly need to work in a wall of sound so I can get lost in altered states. I have an enormous music collection, so the type of music can range from Krautrock to New Wave to AM Gold to Industrial to obscure Moog from the 70s.

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EJG: Even though your compositions are seemingly messy and crowded, there is an undeniable refinement to them. Is that intentional? LS: Absolutely. My paintings are embedded with contradictions. The tension between composure and loss of control are always at play in each piece. It's a precarious balance that shifts in proportion from piece to piece. A successful painting, for instance, is one that appears excessive but has very little material on it. Some appear elegantly opulent, but are dripping with rude blobs. It is crucial that whatever is happening in each piece cannot be instantly assessed or nameable for anyone including myself.

EJG: Do you have any shows lined up? LS: I will have 16 collages on view in a Fall group show called *Dramatis Personae* at Dodge Gallery in the Lower East Side [of Manhattan]. It will be on view September 3 – 26, 2010. The opening reception is September 10.



Apache Snow Queen, 2010 | Mixed media collage on archival print on paper, 19 x 13 inches