



## JANE SWAVELY

Jane Swavely's (b. 1959, Allentown, PA) abstractions attempt to reconcile romanticism and minimalism while referencing natural and cinematic elements. Intense areas of color are set against zones where paint has been wiped from the surface, revealing undertones and vestigial forms. Swavely's practice is intuitive and comes from the artist's subconscious, each work an expression of a lingering thought. Compositionally, visual evocations of screens and portals are constant in the work as is an illusive silver tone, appearing intensely reflective and polished in some works and a tarnished patina in others. When combined with rich pigmented color otherwise present in her paintings the results can be emulsive and luminous, recalling some alchemical consequence.

Jane Swavely attended the figurative academic program at Boston University College of Fine Arts which was led by Philip Guston in the 1970s and subsequently James Weeks. Swavely moved to New York City in 1980, and worked as an assistant to New Image artist Lois Lane while attending the School of Visual Arts, and then for Brice Marden until 1985. In 1986 at the age of twenty-five, she held her first solo-show at CDS Gallery. She was part of the CDS Gallery roster until 2005. As her career progressed, Swavely became part of A.I.R, a legendary female-run art space founded in the 1970s. A.I.R provided her with five solo exhibitions from 2011-2022, showcasing the depth and breadth of her talent over the years.

Swavely has held solo exhibitions at Magenta Plains, New York, NY; the New Arts Program, Kutztown, PA; Loyola College, Baltimore, MD; and the Mandeville Gallery at Union College in Schenectady, NY. She has exhibited her paintings in group exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Nashville, and abroad. Swavely is the recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship. Her work is in numerous public and private collections, including the JPMorgan Chase Art Collection and the Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania. She currently lives in her loft on the Bowery in New York City and maintains a studio in Hudson Valley, New York.

*Art and Object*  
March 9, 2024

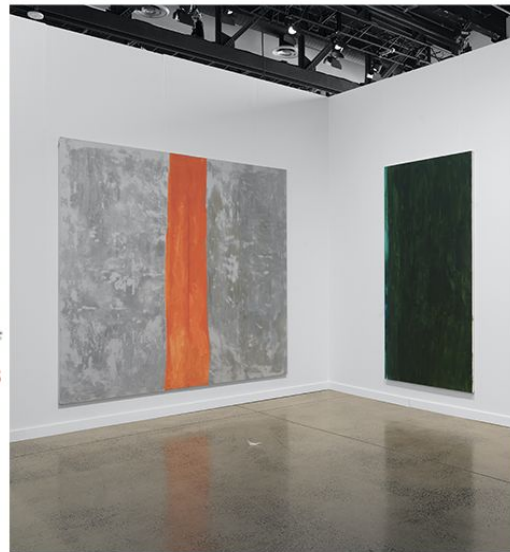


# Previewing Independent Art Fair's 15th New York Edition

MAY 8, 2024 | PAUL LASTER

A mid-career artist, Jane Swavely was trained as a figurative artist at Boston University College of Fine Arts, where **Philip Guston** had been influential and **Brice Marden** had studied. Working with Marden from 1980 to 1985, Swavely moved into a loft on The Bowery, where she still lives, to pursue her painting practice.

Swavely had her first solo show at age 25 at CDS Gallery in 1986 and continued to be represented by the gallery for 20 years before becoming a member of A.I.R., a legendary, female-run space for **women artists** founded in the 1970s. Here, she exhibited her atmospheric abstractions exploring light, landscape, and intuitive mark-making from 2011 to 2022. Earlier this year, Swavely had her first solo show with Magenta Plains, who is presenting her paintings at the fair alongside British minimalist painter Alan Uglow, who also lived and worked on The Bowery until passing in 2011.



COURTESY OF JANE SWAVELEY AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK  
Installation view. Independent Art Fair: Jane Swavely and Alan Uglow. Magenta Plains. New York, NY. 2024.

"The paintings are reductive but not **minimalist**," said Swavely. "Until 2018, they were gestural landscapes. I wanted to get away from that very romantic tradition. I made a concerted effort to make the work that wasn't about landscape, but the **color** subconsciously comes from going Upstate, and the light—a cold gray light—comes from living on The Bowery. I sail a lot, so time on the water has definitely influenced me—the luminosity of light on the water. I also love film. There's a screen-like element to the paintings, in the way **movies** are shot and the composition of the shots. I'm looking at a screen every day. Whether it's my computer or Instagram or looking at images, the light comes from behind the screen. With some of my paintings, I feel like the light is coming from behind the canvas."



COURTESY OF JANE SWAVELY AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

Jane Swavely. Silver OID #4. 2022. Oil on canvas. 90" x 90"

*Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*  
March 9, 2024



## Jane Swavely at Magenta Plains



*Installation view, Jane Swavely: Paintings, Magenta Plains, New York*

In what has turned out to be a triumphant exhibition, Jane Swavely presented paintings executed over the last couple of years, denoting a pared down phase of her practice to essentials that serve it well. The expediency of the work is alluded to in a somewhat cryptic statement Swavely made (referring to her paintings) she said: “they are better when they are past”. Does such a stance—the preference for looking forward that the statement implies—foretell a progressive agenda, or a statement of faith? Either way, moving forward serves her practice with advantage. By committing to pure abstraction, in scale reminiscent of the New York School, Swavely puts methods front and center. There is a preference for the one-shot, the unfussy; a reliance on rags to wipe away and highlight, together with the use of large flat brushes, giving the paintings their greasy, smeary, and particularly feathery atmospheric qualities.

Then, there are her experiences as studio assistant to Lois Lane and Brice Marden, which filters in with nods to ‘new image’ totemism and distinct color. Swavely has a penchant for contrasts between gritty, sooty, silvers that come across as though they have been admixed with charcoal, and sectors of often acid hues. Her use of silver has been linked with her oft-cited interest in cinema. In a recent interview she spoke of being effected by the compositions and photography found in Michelangelo Antonioni masterpiece “La Notte”. Then there is the art-historic lineage of the pigment—from Pollock to Warhol to Stella and Humphries—all of which are absorbed in Swavely’s usage, from emotive formalism to remove (chilliness). She has dragged Modernism into the twenty-first century, utilizing the benefit of time, distance and experience. And, yes, there are harbingers to the Ab-Ex trinity of Newman, Rothko and Still, in the work, that can also be viewed as best in a rearview mirror, allowing movement beyond the boundaries of isms.



*Jane Swavely, OID #3, 2021, oil on canvas, 56 x 44 inches*

Upon entering the gallery one encounters “OID #3 Green”, 2021 hung above the front desk. It is a fantastic piece of bucolic painting, in which smokey labyrinths of slashing brush strokes and washes hold one as if deep within a wood. Or, is it a murky interior, beyond a partially opened door that beckons us? The earliest, and smallest (56 x 44 inches) canvas in the show, it’s distinctiveness seemingly the criteria for setting it off from the main body of the exhibition. Chromatically, it forges a sisterhood with Moira Dryer’s casein panels.

The majority of the works have this delineation of ‘OID’ as a component of their titles. Swavely has said that, referring to this component, that she came upon its meaning a fragment of a work, a mere syllable, as in it’s usage as a suffix often implying an incomplete or imperfect resemblance to what is indicated by the preceding element. And, only later did she come across the three letter combination being used as an abbreviation for: object identifier. Is she pointing out the dependence her work has on preceding history, as in that it is somehow zomboid to the original?



*Jane Swavely, Silver OID #6, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 inches*

The gallery proper is lined with six monumental canvases. The largest, “Silver OID #6”, 2022, a diptych measuring seven-and-a-half-feet square, takes place of prominence, occupying the far central wall. By positing one figure, made up of a blackish/reddish/brownish column—with three-quarter of it sitting on the right edge of the left panel and one-quarter taking up the left edge of the right panel—there are evocations of nothing so much as an Oceanic or Easter Island totem. This impression is aided by the ‘chunks’ taken out of it along the uppermost edges by spots of overpaint and/or splatter from the surrounding field of silver. A flanking wall holds two 90 x 45 inch paintings, “Magenta OID”, 2023 and “Silver OID #7”, 2022, a work that Swavely has admitted having struggled with, including intervention by her dog, has led to a result that I would categorize it as involved with what has come to resemble something close to capturing movement. A close cousin to Pat Steir’s waterfalls, there is a rougher, brinier edge here, the flow having been applied by direct contact rather than pouring and washing with spray.

While those paintings become treatises on bisection, or centrality, a pair that share a wall, “Light Trap #3” and “Light Trap #4”, both 2023, each 90 x 45 inches, hanging at a respectful distance from each go with another strategy. These twins each balance an abbreviated rectangle of rich color, with a billowing sail-like quality enhanced by their bendy shapes, bracketed by an L-shaped banding of signature silver. The respective zones are treated with the same atmospheric streakiness we have come to expect. Here Swavely has switched her titling regiment, from the evocative oids, with their intimation of likenesses, to focus the direct gaze at the holy grail of painting.



*Jane Swavely, Light Trap #2, 2023, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches*

The show closes out with “Light Trap #2”, 2023, predominated by brilliant yellows and oranges, delineated as three vertical sectors, the largest a little off-center, and highlighted by a ray running down the left sector that brought to mind illumination from a Dan Flavin sculpture, of all things, but more provocatively, it called to mind the astounding depiction of the angel Gabriel as a pure column of light in Henry Oshawa Tanner’s luminist “The Annunciation”, 1898 to be found in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*Henry Oshawa Tanner, The Annunciation, 1899, collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art*

The interest that Swavely has culled from the art community recalls the excitement Susan Rothenberg was able to rally to her spare atmospheric imagery that, similar to Swavely's, relied on paramount figure/ground relationships.

As a long-time denizen of the Bowery, whose locale has infiltrated her practice, it seems apt that Swavely's commitment to her resolute career, finds a home at the head bulwark of this storied thoroughfare, giving us a new standard bearer. **WM** By **EDWARD WAISNIS**

HaberArts  
January 19, 2024

### *Women Remake Abstraction*

#### *Holding in the light*

John Haber  
in New York City

When Jane Swavely calls a painting *Silver OID*, silvery it is. It does not need metallic paint or glitter, just oil on canvas to shine. It does not need shifting reflections as one's eye crosses its surface or one's body walks beside. It attains that sense of visual and material substance with paint alone, the brush carrying pools of white as it will, covering and mixing with gray. It looks back to a time when painting pretty much meant painting in oil, for its ability to lend depth to a flat surface by holding in the light.

Not that everyone back in the day needed oil. Enamel and industrial paint were good enough for Jackson Pollock now and then, for their shine and low cost, but then he also threw in cigarette butts and coins. Still, Swavely looks back, in her scale and commitment to abstract art as well. Paintings can run up to ninety inches high, and the sixth in the series is ninety inches square. She likes how large paintings are that much more visual and material.

That version looks to a different postwar artist, too. A broad stripe descends the full height of the painting, much like "zips" for Barnett Newman. Swavely is thoroughly contemporary, and her paintings are and new, but then the Jewish Museum has argued for Newman's relevance to art today. Her zip, like his, cannot so easily stick to the edge or center of the canvas. Here its right edge falls just to the right of center. Still, it has fluid edges, much as Newman sometimes allowed his brush to show in a zip while keeping the background color seemingly untouched.



Hold on, though, for she is not just reworking the past. Blacks lend depth to that deep red vertical, much as whites lend silver to gray. The stripe is also more than a foot wide, like brushstrokes for David Reed, and another painting devotes roughly its left half to much the same rust and blood red. One could almost see the halves in collision, were the boundary not so loose and permeable. One could almost see the gray as background, were the brushwork on both halves or within the larger silver field and the stripe not so much the same. Other paintings defy the very thought of a zip, as one color climbs the right edge and crosses over the top.

They may look as if they date to the 1950s, but Swavely is not history. Born in 1959, she has long exhibited with A.I.R., the women's collective in Dumbo. Just starting out, she assisted Brice Marden and Lois Lane at that. One can see Marden's equation of monochrome color fields with drawing in her abstract painting—and Lane's *New Image* painting, like that of Jennifer Bartlett and Susan Rothenberg, in her refusal of purity. The material nature of paint here is just that, a step into this world, not a higher calling. She might cringe at Newman's "The Sublime Is Now."

She fits with the present interest in overlooked women in abstraction, although she has exhibited regularly since the 1980s. She may still seem to fall between generations or run across them. Yet her work is a powerful alternative to the "everything goes" version of the revival of painting or, for that matter, to the zip. Past shows have presented a still greater depth, using dark, resonant colors with elusive outlines. There, too, she insists on that visual and material substance. It carries her from deep red against silver to color climbing the wall.

*Jane Swavely at Magenta Plains through February 24.*

*Two Coats of Paint*  
January 18, 2024

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

SOLO SHOWS

# Jane Swavely and the Bowery tradition



*Jane Swavely, OID #3 Green, 2021, oil on canvas, 56 x 44 inches*

Contributed by Michael Brennan / **Magenta Plains** is located on the Bowery, just as it breaks left onto Canal Street, in Chinatown. Upon entering, viewers are immediately greeted by a washy *terre verte* Jane Swavely painting, *OID #3 Green*, hanging above the desk. It sets an organic tone and is indicative of the half-dozen paintings to follow, hanging in the first-floor main gallery. Swavely's seven canvases are all vertical, and are mostly diptychs, internalized or externalized. They are loosely painted with a 2- to 2 1/2-inch flat brush, heavy on the solvent, with some wiping away by hand. Much color mixing happens directly on the surface. Swavely favors flared, phosphorescent hues. She cleverly manipulates paint with rags to create the illusion of light emitting from the ground. Her work glows, appearing backlit. **Mark Rothko** would often talk about the effects of his timeworn brushes, but **Milton Resnick** revealed that Rothko secretly rendered most of his effects through wiping, adding and subtracting with rags. Swavely is after a different visual feel but employs similar means.

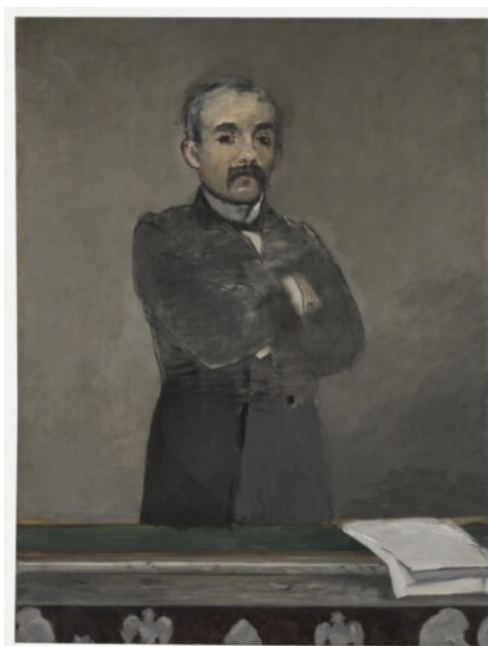


Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #2*, 2023, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches

Swavely's paintings begin and end *in media res*, that is, in the middle of the action. There's not much distinction between background and foreground, underpainting and finish, beginning and end. She prefers her work to appear "super fresh" and not "labored," as she noted in a [2022 \*Two Coats of Paint\* interview](#). I prefer paintings that err on the side of unfinished as opposed to overworked. [Sharon Butler](#) explored this tension in some depth in connection with the MetBreuer exhibition "[Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible](#)" in 2016. For anyone skeptical of the preference, I offer two Manet paintings of French prime minister Georges Clemenceau:



Musee d'Orsay: Edouard Manet, *Georges Clemenceau* (1879-1880), oil on canvas, 37 x 29.5 inches (94 x 73.8 cm)



Kimbell Art Museum: Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Georges Clemenceau* (1879-1880), oil on canvas, 45 5/8 x 34 3/4 in. (115.9 x 88.2 cm)

Is the more finished painting on the right actually better? I think the less finished one is the livelier of the pair, and Swavely makes a strong argument for leaving well enough alone. It takes considerable maturity for any artist to recognize when the time is right to step out of a painting, and then simply to stop.

Paintings, of course, embody the artist's lineage. Swavely's might begin with **Olga Rozanova** and run through **Moira Dryer**.



Kremlin Museum: Olga Rozanova, 1917, oil on canvas, (28 x 19.2 inches / 71.2 x 49 cm)



Moira Dryer, *Pop*, 1989, 2 parts: acrylic and wood, and steel.  
Acrylic/wood: 48 x 61 inches. Steel Plate: 31 x 13 inches.  
Courtesy of Van Doren Waxter.



Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #4*, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches



Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #3*, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches

Her two diptychs, with their internalized fissure and doubly gnashing edges, recall **Barnett Newman's** notion of “The Plasmic Image” and **Günther Förg's** post-modern reboots with their lightning bolt drop.



*Barnett Newman, Ulysses, 1990, oil on canvas, 132 x 50 inches / (335.3 x 127 cm)*



*Gunther Förg, Untitled, 1990, acrylic on lead, 94 1/2 x 63 inches (240 x 160cm)*

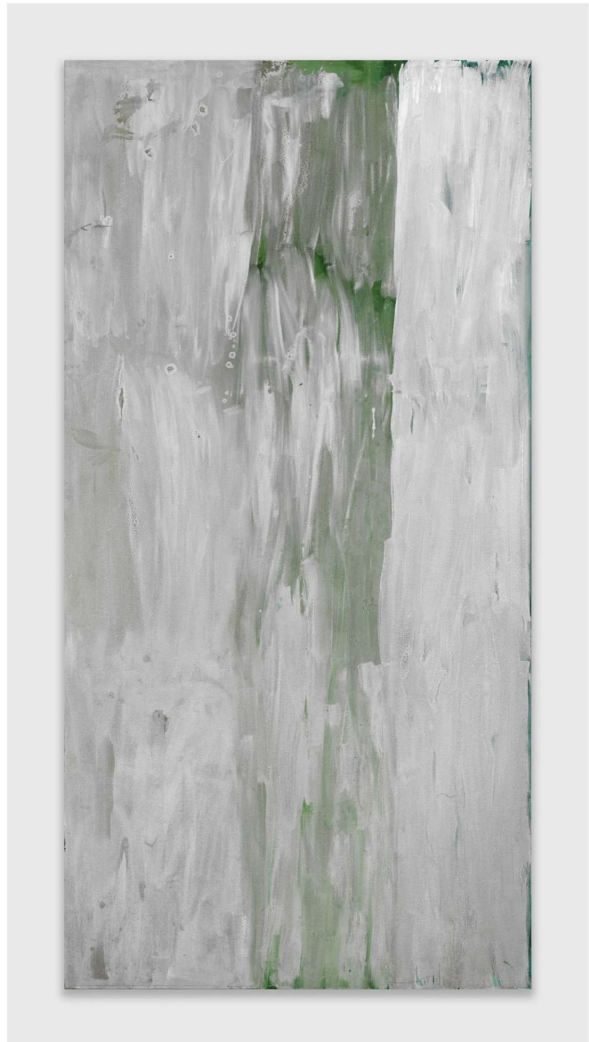
Swavely is most adept in her use of silver paint and finds an extraordinary range of value between light and dark in this color. Silver paint – in particular, metallic aluminum paint – has a long history in “American Type Painting,” beginning with **Jackson Pollock** and running through to **Frank Stella** and **Andy Warhol**. Swavely’s use of silver is closer to **Warhol’s Hollywood silver-screen mode**. Many contemporary painters, such as **Jacqueline Humphries**, likewise use silver as a media signifier. Reinforcing Swavely’s reference to cinema is the narrow profile of her stretchers, which nearly sink into the wall, unlike the blocky, more object-like presence of standard heavy-duty stretchers. Swavely considers all interpretations.

# MAGENTA

# PLAINS



*Jane Swavely, Magenta OID, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches*



*Jane Swavely, Silver OID #7, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches*



*Jaqueline Humphries, NMM...MMM, 2023*



Jane Swavely, Silver OID #6, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 inches



John Millei, Quicksilver #6, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 132 x 132 inches (335.3 x 335.3cm)

**John Millei** is another contemporary painter who is accomplished at parsing silver, but his acrylic work is flatter and less nuanced than Swavely's oil paint, with its lively interplay of light.

Finally, I appreciate that Swavely, a longtime Bowery denizen, is showing in her own neighborhood. It anchors the context of her abstraction, the Bowery being home at one time or another to its own distinctive subset of New York School artists, including Rothko, **Cy Twombly**, **Eva Hesse**, **Robert Ryman**, and **Brice Marden**. Swavely is pushing the same line, kicking some life into a storied tradition, moving it forward, and keeping it super fresh with modernist painting that raises questions and possibilities rather than enclosing itself in quotations and remaining categorically frozen.



Magenta Plains Gallery: Jane Swavely, Paintings, 2024, Installation View

*Two Coats of Paint*  
March 9, 2022

TWO  
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PAINT

## STUDIO VISIT

# On the Bowery with Jane Swavely



Contributed by Sharon Butler / **Jane Swavely** has lived and worked in a loft overlooking the Bowery since the 1980s when she was an SVA student and later a studio assistant to **Brice Marden**. Since “**Jinx**,” her pre-pandemic solo show at A.I.R. gallery, Jane’s work has become more subtractive, with looser brushwork, more gamsol and linseed oil, and lots of aggressive wiping out — erasing with big rags that she gets by the carton. She is fond of garish near-neon greens and vivid oranges and has introduced silver metallic paint that glimmers and changes depending on the light. Loose geometric shapes contrast with thin hard-edge lines — traces of the crossbar supports behind the canvas. Two of her paintings are on view in “**Very Metal**,” a witty group show at Theodore Gallery in Tribeca through March 11. Although she doesn’t like to talk about her work, Swavely invited me to stop by and see what she’s been up to.

**Sharon Butler:** Well, it looks like you’ve been making some moves since the last time I was here. These paintings are so loose. I love the metallic. What are you looking for in these new paintings? Where do you start?

**Jane Swavely:** I’d say I’m looking for a sort of luminosity that doesn’t necessarily translate to landscape. I’m trying to erase the landscape with minimal spatial representation I want to make non-representational objects with as little effort as possible. Thin paint. Not overworked. I want them to look super fresh. Sometimes they’re really fast, and then sometimes — like that one over there — they might take a couple of years. That one is my least favorite, because it just feels so labored. Where do I start? It’s more about stopping. I try to stop as soon as I can, when I feel like the painting has light and space and doesn’t seem predictable.

**SB: Yes, the paintings have a sense of incompleteness. The erasure and scrubiness give a sense that the work is in process, whereas that one you don't like has definite lines and near-solid paint coverage. The process is additive and there is no subtraction or erasure.**

JS: I don't have a preconceived notion of what it's about when I start. [Laughs] I think about what it's about afterwards. When I'm making them I'm just interested in the materials and the way the paint behaves, the mixtures of colors, especially the silver paint, and I want to make them as minimal as possible. Subtraction is interesting. The paintings are stretched and primed usually by me (I learned how to stretch huge canvases working as a studio assistant throughout my 20s ) and painted flat on the floor. You can see the stretcher bars and the actual physicalness of the painting and the materials. They're slippery. If a painting looks like it's almost unfinished, if I like the shapes and there are cool moments in it that I enjoy, then it's done.

**SB: Your work lends itself to working on huge canvases because it seems that the material struggle is what the painting is all about. The smaller ones are very different. They are tidier.**

JS: Yeah, I love huge paintings. I wish I had the space to make even bigger paintings right now, but I don't. I'm going to knock down some walls and reclaim my space out there [points out to the bedroom that her kids, now grown, occupied while they were young and her husband's music room]. I love those humongous **Clifford Styll** paintings in the Met.

**SB: What do you love about huge paintings?**

JS: I like the physicality of them, the way you feel when you stand in front of them.

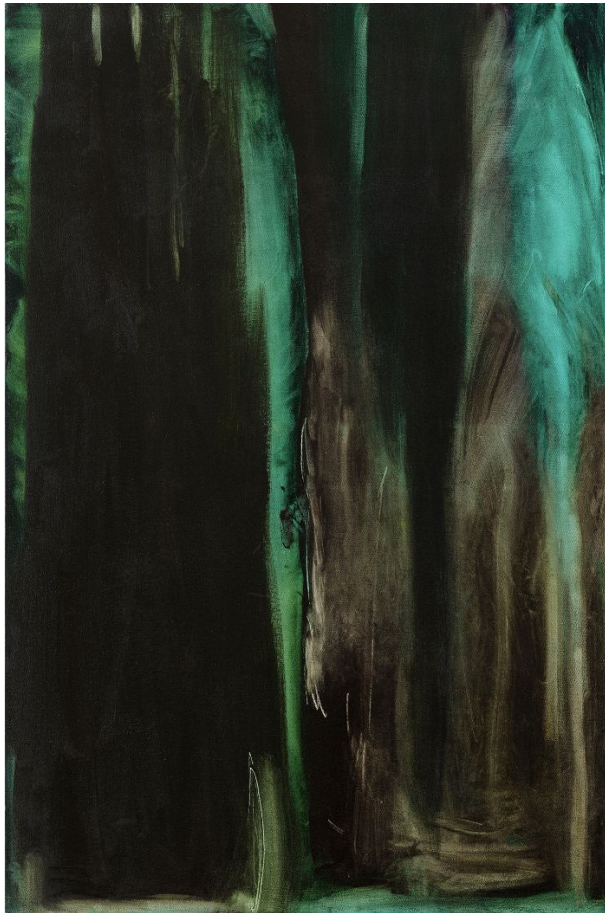
**SB: That they tower over you?**

JS: Yeah, and making something that large feels really powerful somehow, although they're not very practical. I thought I was going to stop making big paintings, and then I thought, what the hell, who cares about practicality, I'm going to do it anyway. What I'm after calls for it. I just want to paint.

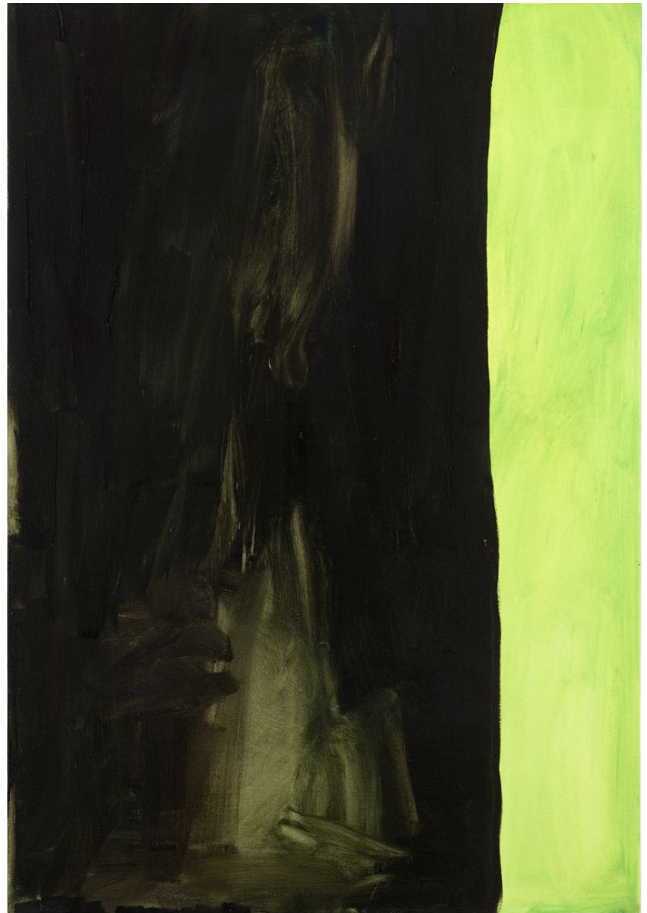
*Art Spiel*  
May 8, 2020

# ART SPIEL

## Artists on Coping: Jane Swavely



*Jane Swavely. Jinx #2, 2018. Acrylic on canvas. 38x25 inches.*



*Jane Swavely. Will-o'-the-wisp, 2019. Acrylic on canvas. 38x25 inch.*

Jane Swavely is a painter based in New York City. She studied at Boston University and the School of Visual Arts and was the recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship. Previously represented by CDS Gallery, she is currently a member of A.I.R gallery.

**AME: How are you coping?**

**JS:** Like many, I am in a constant state of anxiety and concern magnified by the incompetence of the administration's failures and lies. I had to put my dog Henry down two weeks ago after 14 years of his companionship and that threw me. I am fortunate to be quarantining with family with access to nature. I begin each day by reading Heather Cox Richardson's "Letter from an American" to get some clarity on each day's events.



*Installation view, Mandeville Gallery, Union College. Courtesy of Union College.*

**AME: When I saw you last we drove up to Union College to attend the opening of a survey exhibition of your work at The Nott. The 16-sided circular building serves as the centerpiece of the college and your work was displayed on one floor on opposite ends, on cascading temporary walls. The undulating setting highlighted the movements within your abstract work. Having just seen the landscape and shifting light in the area added greatly to the viewing experience. Can you tell us a little bit about your work with the curator and the install?**

**JS:** The install was a collaboration with curator Julie Lohnes who serves as the Director of Art Collections and Exhibitions at the college. I felt strongly that the paintings needed to be hung up to the edge of the panels since the paintings themselves play with cropping and edges and they would visually overlap. We played around with that idea and I think that it gave Julie a different way of thinking about the paintings. She hung the show so thoughtfully with a sort of undulating rhythm and interesting juxtapositions.

In contrast to a white cube, the space is unique and dark, with period details, dark red walls and panels on which the paintings are hung. I was concerned that the paintings might compete with the magnificent space, but when I saw it for the first time with the afternoon light filtering through the windows the paintings glowed. In fact, the light shifts during the day and so the paintings needed to be lit accordingly.

**AME: In our last interview, we talked about the influence of film in your work. In this current show the diptychs, among them "The Blue Light #a" (2019) and the "The Boy's Painting" (2019), in addition, to your work incorporating neon, really stood out to me. Could you tell me how they relate to light?**

**JS:** Thinking about film has always been a constant albeit subconsciously, the way shots are framed and cropped, light coming from within. These later paintings, some of which were in the show at A.I.R. in late 2018, are a result not just of being in the landscape but also of inordinate amount of screen time and the light from the screen; a sort of green screen where anything is possible. These paintings come from a zeitgeist of images and work that I am looking at along with my experience in the natural world, in the landscape. The state of the environment and the toxic colors interrupt any sort of romanticism the paintings may have.

**AME: In what ways has your routine changed?**

**JS:** I am fortunate to be able to spend time upstate with family for now, occasionally going home on the Bowery to pick up supplies and mail and to water my plants. I try to spend the majority of my day in studio mode, but it is very hard to stay focused or to concentrate for very long with the world in flux. I am working on drawings for the most part. I am staying active with my A.I.R. Gallery community through Zoom and I spend a lot of time talking on the phone.

**AS: Can you describe some of your feelings about all this?**

**JS:** I am terrified for everyone. I am afraid for those who won't survive. I think about my love New York City and what things will look like in the future.

**AS: What matters most right now?**

**JS:** Kindness compassion and empathy. Give what you can to people who need it. Check in on people who are alone. And in the long run, we need to vote out the administration and his enablers.

*Anna Mikaela Ekstra*

*Two Coats of Paint*  
December 1, 2018

TWO  
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## Interview with Jane Swavely: Toxic glow



Jane Swavely, *Jinx*, 2018, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches

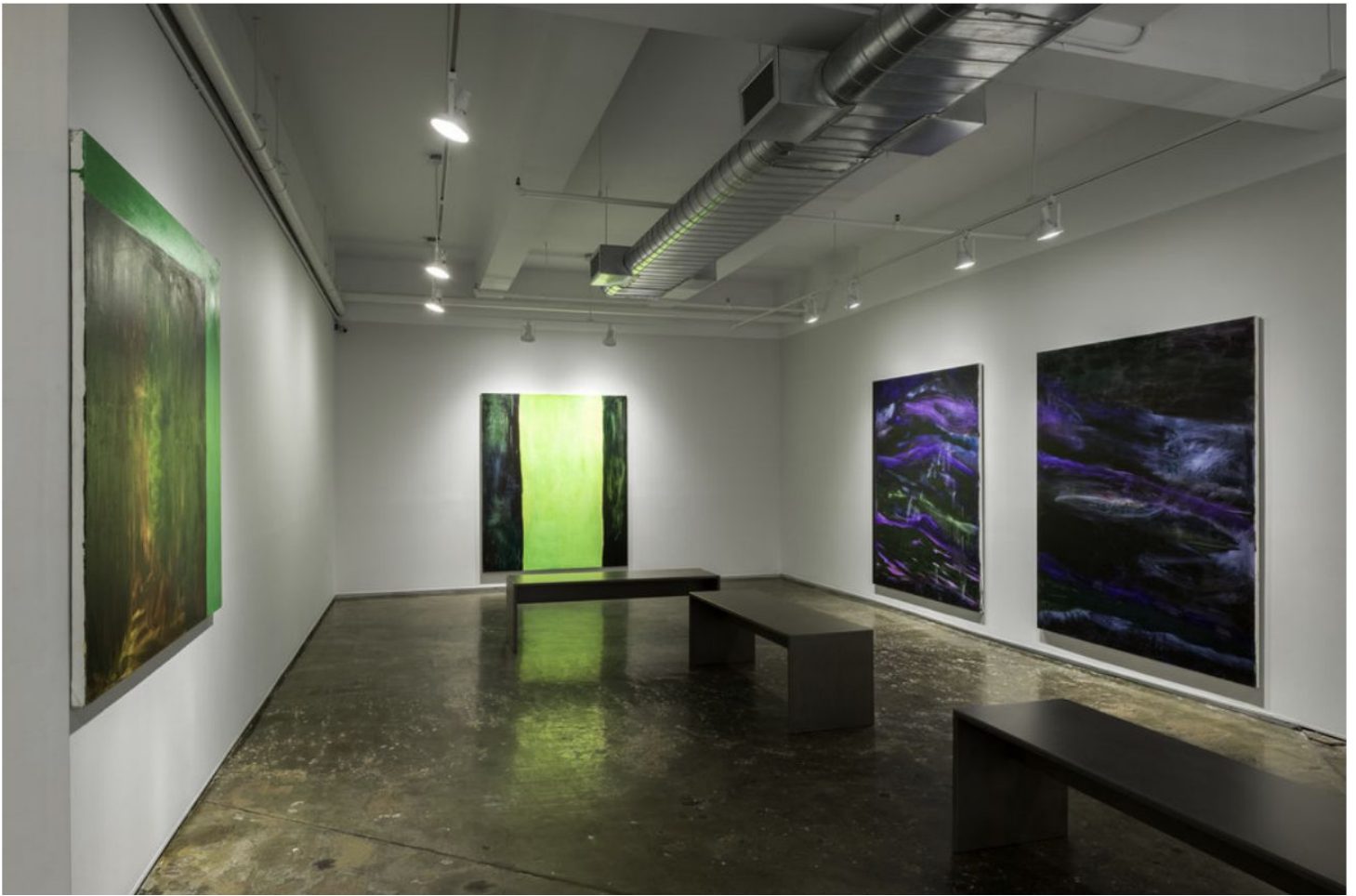


Jane Swavely, *Jinx #3*, 2018, oil on canvas, 38 x 25 inches

Contributed by Sharon Butler / When **Jane Swavely** isn't working in the old-school LES loft where she raised two sons, she is at a cabin in the Catskills or sailing around the northeast on a beautiful, sturdy sailboat that her husband built. The last time we met was on Cuttyhunk Island off the coast of Massachusetts, where she had sailed from Martha's Vineyard, braving nearly gale force winds, to attend a lecture I was giving at **a small painting residency program**. The next day, she sailed off in the fog, bound for the city and back to her studio. On the occasion of her glowing solo show, her fourth at A.I.R. Gallery in DUMBO, I caught up with Jane to discuss the new paintings, futuristic landscape, contemporary anxiety, the joy of mixing color, and the illusion of light.

Sharon Butler: Your work has changed quite a bit since your 2016 show. The old paintings seemed much more comforting and romantic, perhaps nostalgic for a different era, whereas these seem more nervous ♦ anxious and on edge.

Jane Swavely: Yes, I ♦ve been thinking more about the present and the future than the past. When A.I.R. ♦s Associate Director Patti Hernandez came to my studio last spring, she talked about my paintings as a kind of ♦futuristic landscape ♦ that was apocalyptic and nihilistic. I ♦m not a conceptual painter ♦ I start painting and think about it afterwards ♦ but this seemed like an important conversation. The paintings start with a vague interest in mixing colors. I have a very traditional figurative background, and so that ♦s my vocabulary. Yet I have spent time in the landscape of the Catskills in the Hudson Valley and on the water, so that the quiet mysteries of nature ♦ fog, wind, light, dark woods ♦ do seep in. But that ♦s not the only external influence . For my last painting, *Jinx*, I was drawn to images online and on Instagram that had bright neon colors, and tried to figure out how to get that brightness in oil paint. I wanted to make the light appear to come from within the painting, so I mixed cadmium lemon and phthalo green, and then burnished it until it glowed. It ♦s impossible to photograph. I am always visiting galleries and museums, of course, but I love Instagram way too much.



Installation View: Air Gallery

SB: That green looks toxic ♦ like poison. This one is quite different, more opaque than the others.

JS: Yes, the glowy neon does look toxic, but the smaller silvery painting is more romantic. I was fooling around with silver oil paint (which in fact is highly toxic because of the petroleum distillates) as a color, and it added a kind of futuristic element. But it also strikes me as kind of impressionistic. I ♦m playing with the light behind the space



Jane Swavely, *Untitled Silver Painting #4*, 2018, oil on canvas, 43 x 34 inches

SB: The paintings are having an interesting conversation about light. The light pops. But there is some fascinating brushwork as well.

JS: Yes. The color mixtures are what interest me. That ♦s what gets me started on the paintings. But in the process, the paint application becomes kind of performative. I paint the canvases on the floor, crawling around the edges, on my hands and knees, slathering paint on with my hands and taking it off with white cotton rags. I go through boxes and boxes of them. In terms of materials, these paintings are much thinner and less finished and pristine than previous work; they ♦re dirtier. I ♦m not fussy about the surfaces. I didn ♦t want to overwork the paintings, and didn ♦t care if they got sloppy. Even so, an artist who came in earlier in the week suggested that the images looked cropped, and I think that ♦s true because there is a certain screen quality, like a computer, to these paintings, in terms of the light and the opaque framing devices around the landscape-like elements.



Installation View: Air Gallery

**SB:** The responses to your new work have been good. What do you think about the installation? The way the paintings are hung on the south wall, framing the doorway, it feels like walking through a painting. The artist's paintings in the next room are white, so it creates a dream-like scenario. If those paintings had been more lively or colorful, the package wouldn't have worked. And the arrangement of the benches makes a path to the far painting, but also keeps the viewer from getting too close. The acid green of the far painting on the east wall affects all the color in the room, reflecting off every surface. The experience is remarkable.

**JS:** I got lucky. It wasn't planned in advance. Our Executive Director Roxana Fabius and Patti set up the show and I was completely surprised and pleased. I just went with it. We kept the installation fairly spare because each painting is so saturated and needs a lot of room. The more you look at the paintings the more you understand them. Because of how the work unfolds over time, we thought that the benches would encourage people to spend time with it, just looking, and they have proven to be an important part of the installation. On account of the gallery lights, the paintings do look very different out of the studio — more robust, almost like completely new paintings.



Jane Swavely, *Untitled Bb*, Oil on Canvas, 73 x 61 inches, 2018

SB: They both exude and reflect light, especially because of the metallic paint that you use for under painting the smaller ones. Tell me about the titles ♦ *Jinx*, for instance.

JS: This past summer an artist performer and I coincidentally posted green screens on Instagram at the same time, and she commented ♦ *Jinx!* ♦ It happened a few times, and I liked the playfulness of the sentiment, but also the negative, superstitious connotation of bad luck. In fact, I liked it so much, I used it for the title of the show. The other titles are pretty spur-of-the-moment. Some paintings are just plain untitled, others nominally untitled but classified to sound a bit like chemicals. For instance, the purple ones are called *Untitled Aa* and *Untitled Bb*. I don't like forcing a narrative by coming up with a detailed title, and I'm not too interested in narrative in general. I'd rather leave a painting open to interpretation. Sometimes people see small figures in them, and that's not what I intended, but it's OK. I am happy when people bring their own experiences to the work.

**SB:** You know, I don't think many galleries are showing gestural abstractions these days.

**JS:** It never occurred to me, but maybe you're right. A lot of what I see are paintings that are narrative or figurative, or maybe geometric abstraction. I'm interested in making space, and these paintings may be landscape-based, but they are definitely abstractions. I went for broke, and everything I've been trying has finally come together. I feel like, now, in my fifties, I'm making mature work. At last it has snapped into focus. I'm not interested in looking at my old work any more, I just want to keep moving forward. I'm always anxious about getting back in the studio, even after an absence of just a few days, but I think it's important to keep going.

**SB:** You have taken an important leadership role in A.I.R., which, according to the web site, "was established in 1972 as the first not-for-profit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States." The gallery helps younger artists find their way with the fellowship program and continues to promote mid-career artists as well.

**JS:** I've been a member for almost eight years, and president of the board for the past five years. The gallery that represented me had closed and A.I.R. members Joan Snitzer and Susan Bee suggested I apply. It has been a wonderful experience. Our community is constantly evolving. We have artists ranging in age from the early 30s to nearly 80 years old, and the membership is becoming more diverse all the time. One of the things that attracted me was the fellowship program. And it's nice to have a beautiful space to show work with no commercial pressure. Even if you aren't selling work, you can still show consistently. Did you hear that A.I.R. is going to NADA in Miami this year? We got a grant to do a feminist library at the gallery, so we will be promoting that project at the fair, showing member artists' books.

**SB:** It's terrific to see so much new energy and so many intriguing creative initiatives at A.I.R. I know your contribution is very much appreciated in the art community. Congratulations on your show, and thank you for everything you do.

◆ **Jane Swavelly: Jinx,** " A.I.R. Gallery, DUMBO, Brooklyn, NY. Through December 16, 2018. Also on view: "**Joo Yeon Woo: Sound Words**" and "**Hana Sackler: Here, right now.**"

*The American Scholar*  
November 19, 2018



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## Jane Swavely

Neon Forests

By Noelani Kirschner | November 19, 2018

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Painter Jane Swavely (<http://www.janeswavely.com/>) keeps a studio in the Bowery in New York City and exhibits her work as a member at A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn. Although her canvases depict abstracted forms and colors, she considers her work to be based in the landscape tradition. Her latest show, *Jinx*, explores the boundary between the conscious and the subconscious, and derives inspiration from both the natural environment and supernatural forces.

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“I don’t think of my paintings as conceptual but after they’re done, the concepts behind them become clearer. All paintings are made on the floor, where I use a series of washes to create a luminescence. The canvas has to be flat, or else the paint drips. I’m interested in composition and in experimenting with different color combinations. The paintings are all about the color.

I'm a huge fan of Instagram, sadly—I generally don't like social media, but Instagram has been a great way to connect with other artists. There were all of these green lights and neon colors appearing across my feed, and I don't know if that subconsciously influenced my work or not. With regard to the title of my show, I posted a couple of pictures of my paintings to Instagram, and a performance artist in my orbit saw them and said, 'Jinx!' because she would post similar things from her art, like a green screen from one of her performance sets. In the art world, there's often a zeitgeist or a consciousness just below the surface. You don't realize it's there until you start to see it materialize through everyone's output.



Green Screen #3 , oil on canvas, 54 x 56 inches, 2018

The works in *Jinx* are almost alive. My canvases are abstract, but the references to landscape are strong. I spend a lot of time in Upstate New York, and there's this lure of the supernatural up there. The dark woods, animals, even UFOs. I had a friend who saw one hovering above her field in the Hudson Valley about 15 years ago. She thought it was ski lights at first, but it wasn't. There's a sense of these things that comes through somehow in my series.

*Jinx* is a balance between looking at nature and the subconscious experience of being in nature. I don't know if my paintings depict land or water half the time—they're a mixture of both. I don't like to force the viewer into anything, so I keep the titles of my work neutral. I don't want to direct the narrative. I hope that my work unfolds for the viewer and that there are new aspects for them to discover. Some people see figures in my paintings, which is always surprising. Whatever they see or whatever the paintings evoke is fine with me.”

*Cultbytes*  
April 8, 2018

# Cultbytes

## Interview: Supported by A.I.R., Jane Swavely Returns to the Art World

The sun is shining as I pass by the Houston Bowery Wall, a mural owned by Goldman Properties which shows a rotating program of artists. Infamously, Keith Haring was the first artist to paint the wall in the 1970's. Then the Bowery was New York's skid row lined with flophouses, slaughterhouses, and a hangout for the downtrodden and destitute. Now, the street is the home of upscale restaurants and rents in the area have skyrocketed. Just like the area has gone through a renaissance, so has the painter Jane Swavely's career. After taking a step away to focus on raising her two sons she has with the support of a community of female artists returned with full force to the art world.

Swavely receives me in her first floor loft on the corner of Bowery and Houston. When I enter into the softly lit open-plan living, dining room, and kitchen I immediately feel at home. She has lived and worked in the space for some thirty years. Swavely tells me that she together with her husband and the other residents of the building are going through the legal procedures to keep their homes affordable by finalizing coverage under the loft law, to become rent stabilized. To survive in New York you have to be a fighter. But, why fight alone when you can band together with your neighbors?

As Swavely makes me tea we talk about the art works in her kitchen, most are by female friends of hers. As a member of A.I.R. Gallery, an all female artist run gallery, she sees the importance of female artists supporting each other. The artist and co-founder of MAW Liza Lacroix suggested I interview Swavely not only because she is, in her words, "an amazing painter" but also because she hosted the book launch of NUT II at the gallery. NUT is a series of books featuring work by female artists. After Lacroix invited Swavely to contribute to the book's second edition the two painters became friends. About Lacroix, Swavely said, "she is the epitome of a feminist. She gets things done."

Like A.I.R., Lacroix and co-founder Alli Melanson, also a painter, aim to support and celebrate the female artist community through their project NUT. As the feminist gallery has helped revive Swavely's career and Swavely in-turn supported NUT, I was curious to hear more about the power of female artist communities. In light of the #MeToo movement, it is clearer than ever that women must unite to support each other.

We move from the kitchen to the studio. Previously, it was her children's room but has now been reconverted to a workspace. The room is flooded with sunlight and her stretched canvases are piled up against the walls. Swavely moved to New York in the 1980's to attend the School of Visual Arts. She describes the art world then as smaller; there were fewer artists and galleries. "A dog-eat-dog world," where artists had less agency. But, Swavely was lucky; she landed a job as Brice Marden's studio assistant and was able to continue to develop her own work. A major breakthrough in her career was when Willard Gallery picked her up. First, her work was sold out of the backroom. Then in 1986, at the age of twenty-five, she had her first solo-show at CDS Gallery. Generously, Marden gave her two weeks off to prepare for her exhibition. She was part of the gallery's rooster until 2005.



Untitled #4. Pastel on paper, 43 x 34 in. 2017. Photograph courtesy of NUT II.



Jane Swavely, Hudson River Painting #1, each panel 60 x 30 in, 2013.

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“It’s always like true confessions when you have a studio visit.”

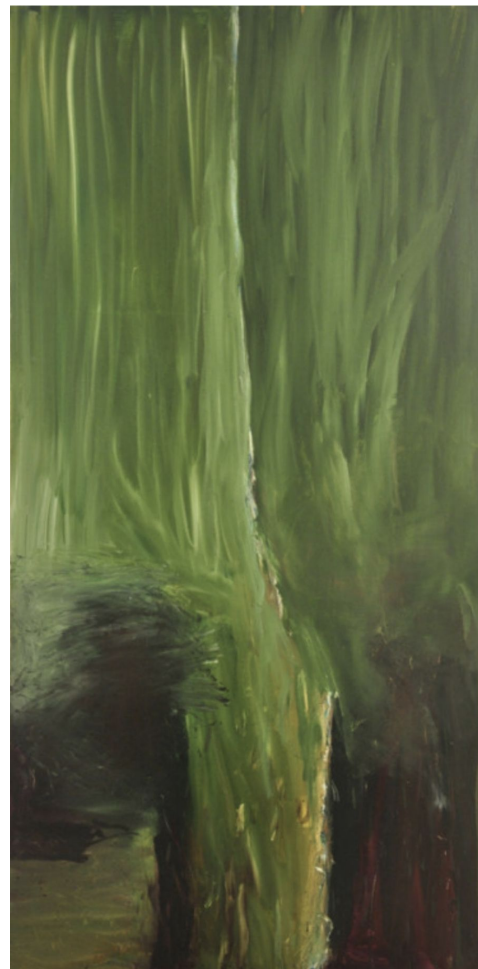
– Jane Swavely

For the sake of her career, Swavely’s first husband, who sadly died, told her to never have children. “But that would have been too selfish of me,” Swavely tells me. When she got pregnant, together with her second husband, her dealer’s response to the good news was: “I have work I need to return to you.” Swavely does not regret prioritizing her family by leaving the art world. With toddlers, it was too hard for her to find the time to paint. But, if her dealer had pushed her to return to her painting career earlier she might have juggled it with motherhood.

Motherhood was at times, isolating for Swavely. Social networking and the Internet, however, changed that. Instagram enabled her to connect with others in the art world. Now, as a member of A.I.R. she is completely immersed in a vibrant artistic community. Twenty founding members including Nancy Spero and Judith Bernstein founded A.I.R. in 1972, most of this core group are today celebrated feminist artists. The non-profit consists of twenty women and self-identified women members who met monthly. In addition to their exhibitions and public programs, A.I.R. runs a fellowship program supporting six artists each year. To date, Swavely has had two solo shows at A.I.R. Gallery, “Espial” in 2016 and “Purlieu” in 2013. The new works I saw in her studio will be on view in her next show at the gallery later this year.



Jane Swavely, "The Blue Light #2," 56 x54 in, oil on canvas, 2013.



Jane Swavely, "Werner's Painting," oil on canvas, 2015.

Her paintings attempt to reconcile romanticism with minimalism. Her works reference landscapes or nature and often include cinematic elements. The interruption, like that of a frame in a film, is a reoccurring feature. A green grass interjects a blue-hued mountainscape; in "Hudson River Painting #1," it is as if she has juxtaposed two paintings in one canvas. The classic German black-and-white film "Das Blaue Licht" directed by Leni Riefenstahl in 1932 informed another series of mountain paintings where the play of light is a prominent feature.

A full immersion in the jungle, "Werner's Painting"(2015) is a direct reference to the documentary "Burden Of Dreams" about the chaotic production of "Fitzcarraldo" by the German director Werner Herzog. The project was difficult for Herzog to realize and, in the process, he was overcome by the jungle: "We have to become humble in front of this overwhelming misery and overwhelming fornication... overwhelming growth and overwhelming lack of order," he says. Swavely's stripped down, but dramatic, rendering of nature may be an offer of support to the crushed director. Swavely does not always like to push a narrative on the viewer, so many of her works are untitled.



Jane Swavely in her studio



Jane Swavely, "Silver Diptych," oil on canvas, 36 x 72 in. 2017.

Nature is close to Swavely's heart. She spends much time in her house in the Hudson Valley. There, she works on several paintings at once. In her city studio, she works at one at the time. Using the floor as her easel, Swavely works in many different sizes, double-squares, and vertical rectangles. She develops her ideas in smaller books or on smaller canvases that stand-alone are works of art. Many of her canvases feel like doorways. When I stand in front of them my body feels diminished. She describes her process as intense and focused. When her husband is away she works the best: "Then I can eat cheerios for dinner and work through the night," she jokingly admits.

"It's always like true confessions when you have a studio visit," Swavely says. Which is true, our conversation was high in energy and we quickly oscillated between talking about her work, private life, and the ever-shifting art world; to me, it is clear that Swavely is keeping up with a keen ear to the ground, or with an eye on who's working with what. We met on the heels of Armory Arts Week. Amongst her highlights was the Bay Area painter David Park's booth at Pier 92. His work is figurative, something that Swavely is moving away from. The intensity of the art market has propelled her to slow down take more time to focus on technique and developing new ideas. A wise decision as her new work is stronger than ever.



Jane Swavely, "Untitled," oil on canvas, 40x30. 2016.



Jane Swavely, "Green Screen," oil on canvas, 36 x 72. 2017.

Swavely's eyes sparkle when she speaks about color. She is a painterly painter; she mixes all her own colors. As an undergraduate at Boston University College of Fine Arts, the program has an emphasis on figuration as Philip Guston headed the department and after him, James Weeks took over. Brice Marden, with whom she worked for several years, graduated from the program some years prior to her. So, they shared many professors. In her newer body of works the natural elements that were present in her previous series have become further abstracted. "Right now I am obsessed with Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still." Newman is a master of abstraction and a leading color field painter. Replacing light and landscape, color has come to the fore in Swavely's her new body of work.

As our visit comes to an end I help put away the canvases Swavely has pulled out for me to see. Among other things, she invites me to A.I.R. Gallery's feminist reading group. Returning to work, in any industry, after having left to become a homemaker is difficult for most. For Swavely however, the process seems seamless. Thanks to A.I.R. Gallery she has found a community where she can be supported and in turn support other female artists. She has now been a member for seven years. Swavely is thriving in this new art world of increased collaboration and give-and-take; I look forward to seeing her continue to rise.

*Two Coats of Paint*  
March 24, 2016

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

## Jane Swavely: Admiration for the jungle

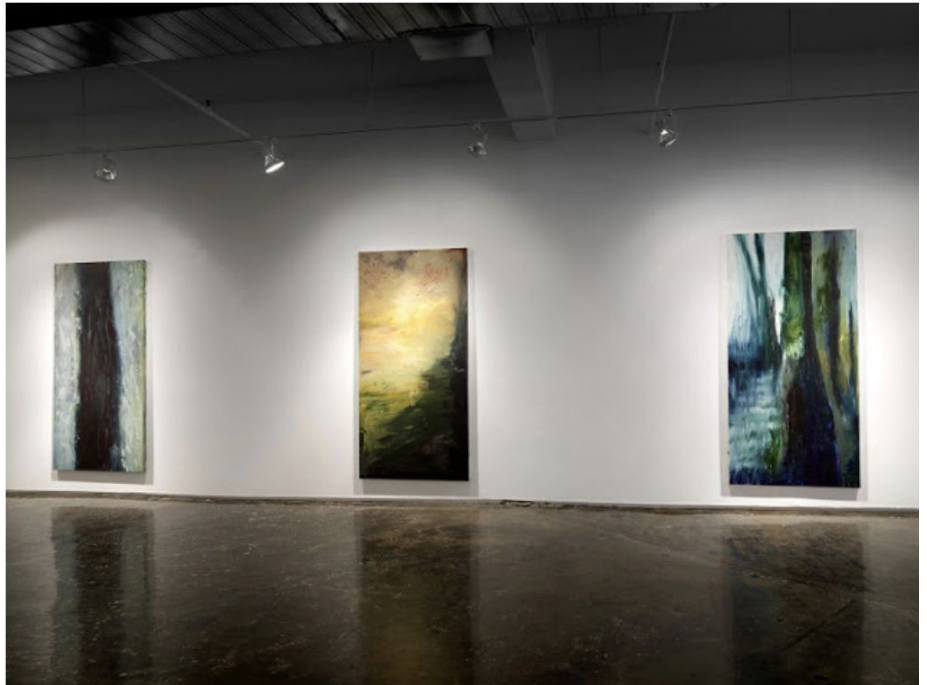


[Image at top: Jane Swavely, installation view from the gallery entrance, A.I.R. Gallery]

Contributed by **Mira Dayal** / There is a sense of unease in the series of paintings that comprise of “Espial,” **Jane Swavely**’s latest show at A.I.R. Gallery. I enter the space ♦ not of the gallery, but of the painting itself. Hovering just inches above the ground, the edges of the canvas become the frame of a doorway, beyond which thick brush conceals a dark forest. But the tall grass of *Werner’s Painting* (2015) is not entirely still; as **Werner Herzog** himself says of the jungle, in *Burden of Dreams* (1982), “There is no harmony in the universe. We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony, as we have conceived it. But when I say this, I say this all full of admiration for the jungle.”



Jane Swavely, *Werner's Painting*, 2015.



Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery. In center, *Untitled, October Painting #6*, 2015, oil on canvas.

While *Werner's Painting* has the most immediate effect, hung on the wall directly opposite the entrance, it is also the earliest painting in this series. Moving through the gallery, one understands how Swavely's interests shifted from flat space and color fields to volumes that are at once fleshy and earthly. Primarily painted in the woods of Vermont during her most recent residency, in 2015 at the **Vermont Studio Center**, each of Swavely's canvases feel thick with the tactility of immersion in a new environment, and with the memory of the same. In *Untitled, February Painting #4* (2016), the viewer finds herself suddenly underwater, kicking at kelpy ferns as a gray whirlpool of oil swirls before her. Inside the painting, the viewer swings around the whirlpool's circumference, feeling the force of its pull, to emerge just beyond that silky, pulsating form into the thin, green, watery environs beyond. *Espial* is the action of watching or catching sight of something or someone or the fact of being seen, and in that conical form of the whirlpool, as one passes it by, one can notice briefly the face within it, a spirit obscured like a drowned Francis Bacon sitter. Now, as Barnett Newman dreamed, the viewer is within both the time and space of the painting, enveloped by its colors. Next to *Untitled, February Painting #4*, a small drawing shows how Swavely worked through the marks and tones that appear in the painting. On the opposite wall, the murky surface of *Untitled, October Painting #6* (2015) is reminiscent of the dark woods of Vermont; the palette evokes a fire burning at a campsite, slowly charring the encompassing trees as the sun sets in the distance. Flanking *October Painting #6* are the two other paintings of the same scale, similarly anthropomorphic, and most evocative of space.

In another corner of the gallery, two perpendicular canvases of a similar color scheme reveal some of the artist's intentions. *Untitled, March Painting #1* (2016) is 40 by 30 inches, but compositionally parallel to *Untitled, March Painting #2* (2016), almost twice as tall at 72 by 36 inches. Both rely on a triangular form within the compositions. The former contains both yellows and purples, making it one of the warmer paintings in the series, while the latter contains deeper and more luminescent navy-purples with more gray than yellow. *March Painting #1* explores the palette that #2 then constricts ♦ using only the tones that help construct the triangular void ♦ making its space immediately more compelling.



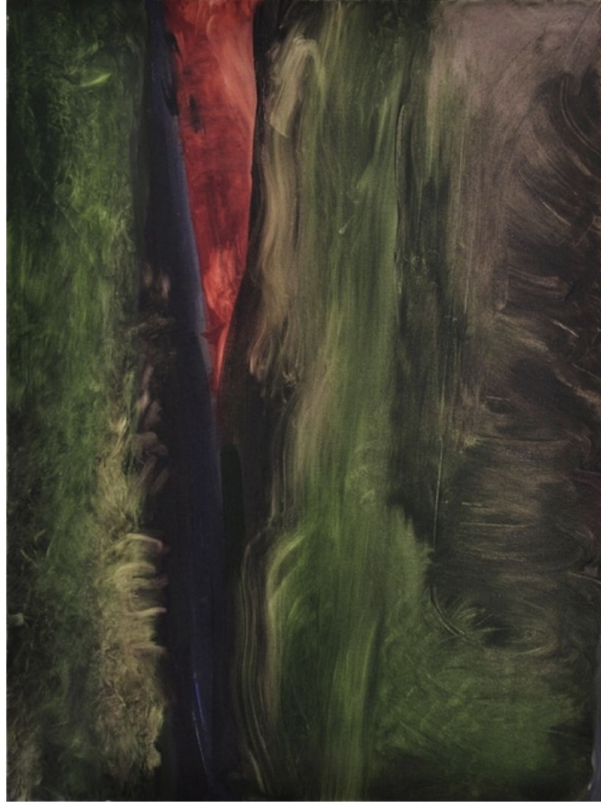
Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery.



Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery.

In their hues and strokes, Swavely's paintings are reminiscent of Edgar Degas's landscape monotypes, in which he used oil paint rather than printer's ink to create abstract smudges and planes of blended tones. Degas's series was inspired by his carriage ride through the countryside. Both series are thus more evocative of the sensation of being in a landscape rather than a specific site.

What allows these works to function as inhabitable landscapes? While Newman's work reeled viewers into a color field, Swavely's paintings resist close inspection, for as one approaches, the brushstrokes that once felt voluminous fall flat, having been washed away by turpentine-soaked rags scrubbed across canvas heavy with oil. Newman relied on horizontality and overall scale to allow the viewer to inhabit the painting through peripheral vision (and indeed most landscapes are painted horizontal to resemble human vision), but Swavely's paintings are vertically oriented. At 72 by 36 inches, most are an invitation for the body, not just the eyes, to enter. They are indeed the size of a doorway, just big enough to contain a body, and though they are not figurative paintings, their logic seems to rely on cavities that are metaphors for corporeality. In this way, one relates to the paintings and finds oneself in them without needing to identify with a literal body.



Jane Swavely, *Untitled, October Painting #8*, 2015, oil on canvas, 40×30 inches.

The paintings are anthropomorphic not only in scale, but also in their logic of fasciae, tendons, and ligaments. When the pressure of stretcher bars against canvas creates parallel lines of more transparent paint on the surface, those lines feel less like a disruption than a vein pushing up against thick skin. When the vibrant, seductive, red triangular form of *Untitled, October Painting #8* (2015) is revealed in the parting of heavy green strokes, it reads as living flesh, thick and bloody, not found in any other painting. Its position in the gallery's foyer is then almost too revealing, representing the core of the space before the space has made itself felt.

In their juxtapositions, Swavely's paintings finally become a new psychological scape, one that allows for personal identifications and evocations of memories. Here the title of the show seems to deliver the most meaning. Entering the paintings is finding oneself in foreign but familiar territory, as an intruder or estranged relative who once understood how to navigate these cool voids but now finds the ravines inverted, hills convoluted. Indeed, the "claustrophobia" Swavely identifies in the show seems to come not from any single work but from the sensation of intrusion, of forms pressing up against the viewer from each wall of the gallery. In a strange inversion, the paintings, or something hidden in their depths, seem to sense one's presence.

**"Jane Swavely: Espial,"** A.I.R. Gallery, DUMBO, Brooklyn, NY. April 21 – May 22, 2016.