



JANE SWAVELY

Jane Swavely studied at Boston University and the School of Visual Arts, eventually settling into her Bowery loft in the early 1980s. Working as a studio assistant to Brice Marden at just 21 years old, Swavely embarked on her own artistic path. In 1986, she held her first solo exhibition at CDS Gallery. 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, showcasing the depth and breadth of her talent over the years.

Swavely's paintings attempt to reconcile romanticism with minimalism, with wide, vibrant brushstrokes. Her works reference landscapes or nature and often include cinematic elements. The interruption, like that of a frame in a film, is a recurring feature. By working with her canvases laid out on the floor, she allows gravity to shape the art, resulting in paintings that become windows into captivating worlds while possessing an insistent objecthood.

In her own words, "Thinking about film has always been a constant albeit subconsciously, the way shots are framed and cropped, light coming from within. These later paintings 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."

Born in 1959, Allentown, PA
Lives and works in New York City, NY

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.

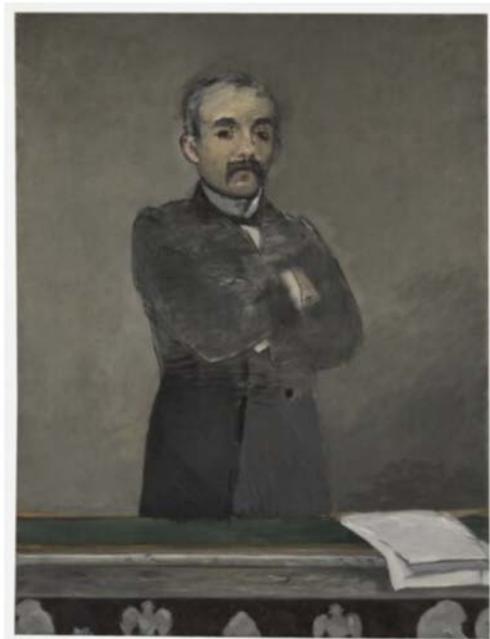


Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #2*, 2023, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches

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 OI#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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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.

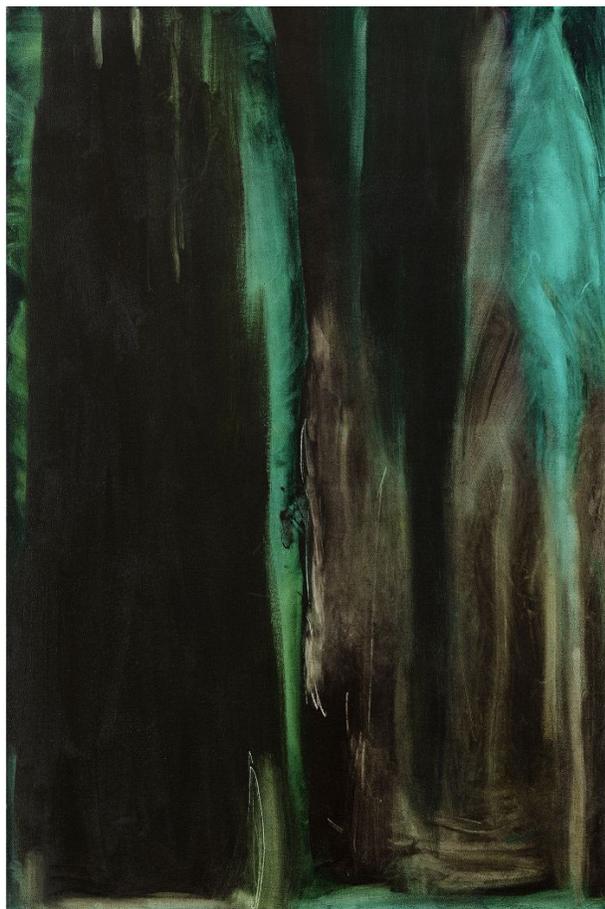
SB: That they tower over you?

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.

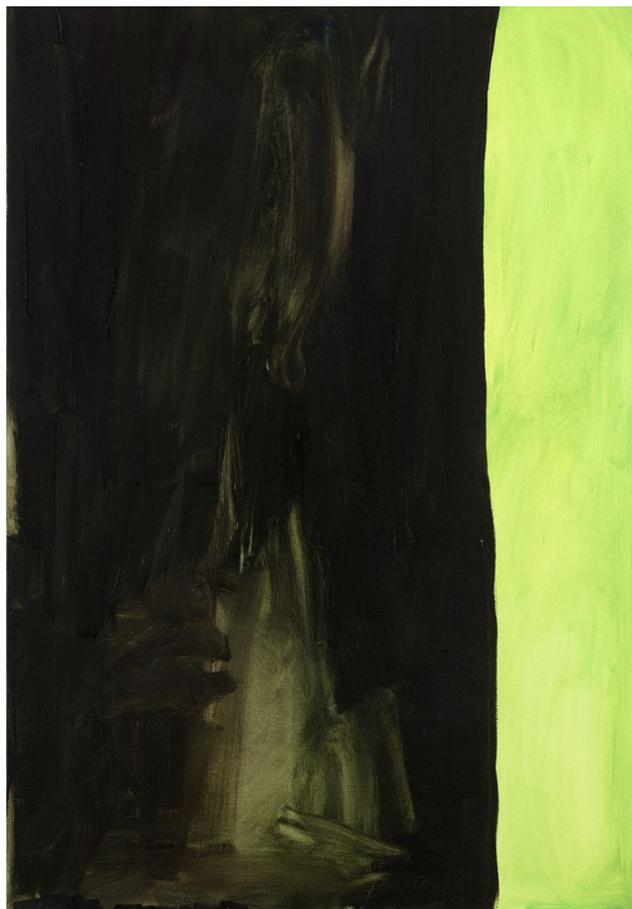
Art Spiel
May 8, 2020

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

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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's 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.

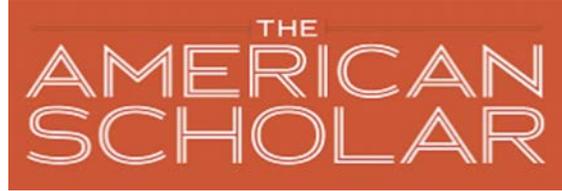
SB: You have taken an important leadership role in A.I.R., which, according to the web site, "was established in 1972 as the first not-for-profit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States." The gallery helps younger artists find their way with the fellowship program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



Jane Swavely

Neon Forests

By Noelani Kirschner | November 19, 2018

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.

“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.



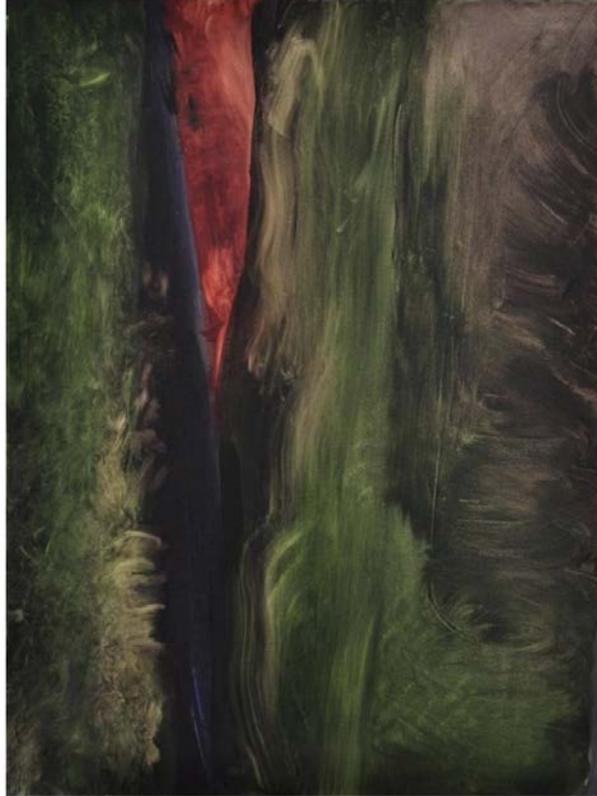
Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery.



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.