

Nancy Pantirer
New Art Center

By **Kristin Reger**

Nancy Pantirer studied at the Hartford University School of Art and earned a Masters of Arts from Montclair State College before coming to New York where she has a studio in Tribeca. Her painting deals largely with color field, and during her recent show called “Elements of Illusion” the New Art Center [see Midtown Listings] Kristin Reger of M spoke with Ms. Pantirer about her work.

So is this your first solo show? No, I’ve shown at the New Art Center for ten years.

How did that relationship start? They used to be on 57th Street and I had submitted slides. It was three years before Serge [the gallery owner] had called me; the work had completely changed since then!

Sometimes it takes that long. It’s a great relationship, he’s helped analyze and influenced my work.

How many pieces do you have in this show, it looks like some of them are quite different. There are seven in this show. One is very large, it was exciting for me; I’d never before transported a piece this large. But it all came together.

Your studio is in Tribeca? Was it hard to find a big enough space down there? I’m very lucky, I’m in an old warehouse, and I’ve been there for a long time.

Artists these days usually have to settle for space out in Long Island City or Brooklyn, so that’s fantastic. There must be wonderful benefits to being in Tribeca; studio visits... museums... Well, unfortunately I have to be honest, when I work, I rarely get out! I have to make myself get out sometimes. I saw the Kandinsky [at the Neue Galerie] show, it was magnificent.

Speaking of that, what artists would you note as your influences in this body of work? My champions are the abstract expressionists, the color field painters, particularly Dan Christensen. It’s also an extension of me and has become much more about surface and illusion, elements of painting.

Elements of Illusion is the name of the exhibition. Painting is the ultimate illusion. You can define space and composition, color takes off and has its own variable, and its own strengths. It’s very two-dimensional,

but moves in to the third dimension. There’s huge reference to Rothko. It’s clean and truthful.

The work is very present and ethereal, very serene. What materials do you use, it’s hard to tell from looking... I’m basically an acrylic painter. The powdery material is iron oxide, I’ve been seduced by it for years. I take an eggbeater and whip my paint with a thinning agent and it breaks up the binding. When I apply it, I get more movement. It’s a foam emulsion. There’s a tremendous amount of control but there’s also an organic element that takes over.

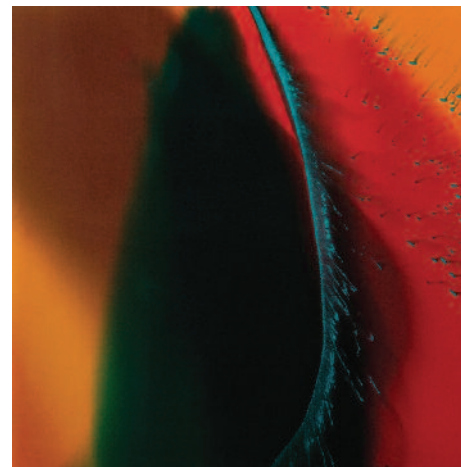
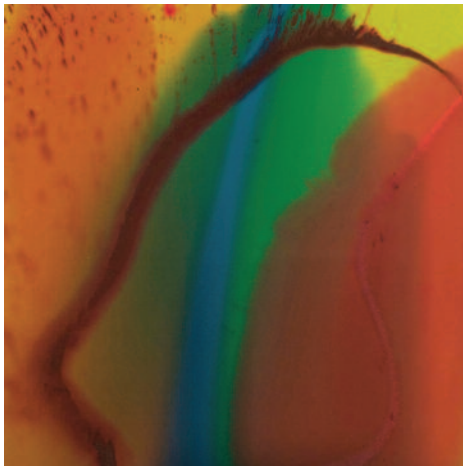
Usually artists work in the reverse, they make their own pigments, but you’re actually taking things apart; it’s interesting since you’re an abstract painter deconstructing. My work is about process. I work on the floor. I don’t want to become to dependent on up and down.

I walk around. Without sounding too romantic, it’s like a dance!

There is a lot of gesture. To keep them open, I work as large as I can. I work unstretched sometimes, I crop the canvases. These other works are something new for me; I worked with a printmaker, they are pigment on paper, as opposed to ink. They’re images of other works. Much of the detail went into the color and the quality of the print. The paintings themselves were much more experiential, these works are like looking at something under a microscope. They became much more articulate in this format.

Everything is very organic, these prints seem to have a martian landscape, and then there’s a butterfly. But that’s what the mind does; it brings its own imagery. It’s almost impossible to absorb something purely abstractly. Our brains are wired by association. The most challenging thing to me is to have it not be

Nancy Pantirer (from left to right) *Elements of Illusion #9*, 2008, digital print, 32" x 32"; *Elements of Illusion #10*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 67" x 60"; *Elements of Illusion #7*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36"; *Elements of Illusion #8*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48".
Courtesy: The New Art Center, New York



Nancy Pantirer (from left to right) *Elements of Illusion #8*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48"; *Elements of Illusion #11*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 24"; *Elements of Illusion #3*, 2008, digital print, 32" x 32"; *Elements of Illusion #4*, 2008, digital print, 32" x 32".
 Courtesy: The New Art Center, New York

something. How it ends up doesn't really matter, the most beautiful orchid... In the process it is hard to keep it pure and devoid of anything that might be in my mind.

When you say surface, I think of textile techniques. Have you studied any crafts? I have a masters in painting. I did work at a few schools including Pratt. I've done a lot of three-dimensional work. I enjoy the tension between two and three dimensions. That's where these paintings sit, moving forward, backward, traditional elements of painting; there's background, foreground, things you generally only interpret through figurative painting, landscape or still life.

The works are graphic; they seem flat, subtle. I soak my canvases with water so that the threads are more able to let the paint travel. It's not an invention, it's one of the principles of color field painting. The

materials open my mind to different approaches. I have this whole topological thing going on, I can see it's going to be a long investigation.

Your works seems clean and premeditated, is it hard to distill it? I have a very impulsive nature, I work on many pieces at a time, it keeps the investment lower in each individual piece; I can't become too entrenched, I can understand all of the works in the context of the others.

How do you choose your palette? I was actually working in grayscale for the longest time. I could not escape! I used floor polisher. Then I came to the studio one day, and thought, I need color! I really just let it go! I acted upon one color, threw it down and built upon that. The only rule I follow is I usually work light to dark.

You caught me at floor polisher... Well that's not in this work, but in these I do use a broom. It's the best way to move paint at this scale. A little brush is not going to do it! It's about capturing movement, these are not stagnant paintings. The gesture is the language.

Have you ever studied dance; has that been an influence in your life? Um, I move... No, I've never studied dance. There's a sense of orchestration and choreography that is metaphorical to dance. But I can't dance.

Well, you can certainly paint. The square seems to lend itself well to moving around and getting into the heart of the canvas. I'm not sure how you did the large pieces though. I had to build a bridge structure over them; just to study, not to paint. Then I got the big broom.

I worked with a choreographer once who incorporated painting into her performance. The documentation that came out of the rehearsals turned out to be the best art from the project. Have you ever considered filming your studio practice? I wrestle with that. I built a ramp in my studio; I was interested in skiing down this ramp with paint on the skis, actually an insane idea. The final product was not great, but the process was so investigative, it's given me the idea! I'm definitely open to that idea. I'm becoming more exposed to video art.

Then you have another art form to deal with, it might change your trajectory... And that's ok. It's all about exploration.

So what's on the horizon for you? I'm involved with the Tribeca Open Studio Program, so that's the next big thing. I won't need to clean my studio until April! **M**