

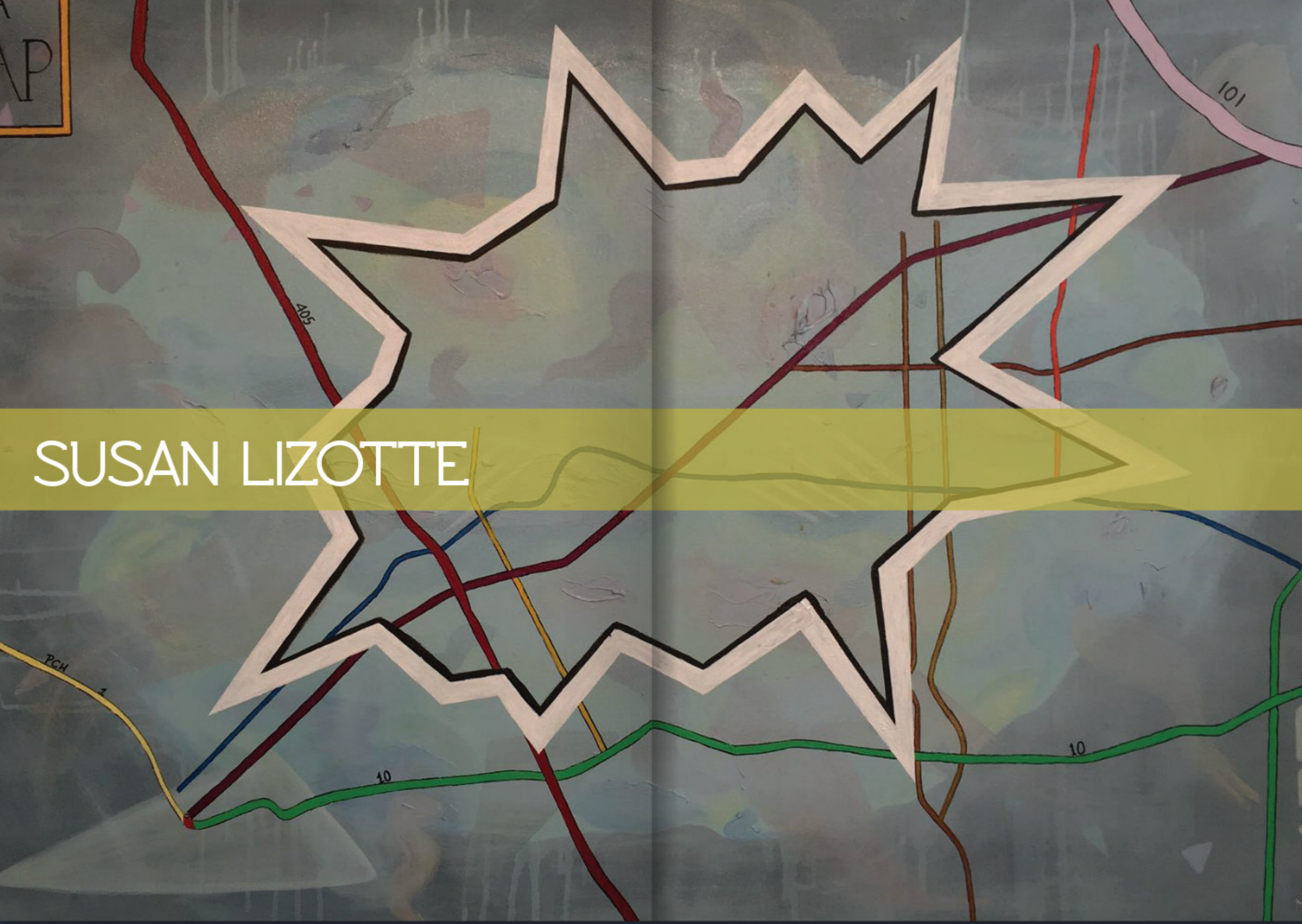
# NOT RANDOM ART



THE CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW



cover: Shane Allan Smith



SUSAN LIZOTTE



**Hello Susan and welcome to NotRandomArt. The current issue is revolving around the problem of identity. Is there any particular way you would describe your identity as an artist but also as a human being in dynamically changing, unstable times? In particular, does your cultural substratum/identity form your aesthetics?**

Absolutely my cultural placement in time and place (Los Angeles) certainly defines me as a white woman artist, yet I feel the need to push those boundaries, particularly of space and time in order to gain a better understanding of the world and all of the identities that have preceded my own existence. The issues of power and its abuse are unfortunately not remotely new and it feels like a new dark age is upon us. Finding a moral identity feels essential in order to navigate the ever changing and very unstable world right now. In my recent work I'm playing in paint with the ideas of space and layering in a painting. The unstable nature of politics and its effects on society, the idea that important decisions are made opaquely by those in power, by those with hidden agendas is what propels me in terms of seeking identity in paintings. I cannot change what my ancestors or those ancestors of my culture, but I certainly feel the need to confront the past and address this in paint. Our identity is up to us and can be changed, we have the ability to forge a new one.

**Would you like to tell us something about your background? Could you talk a little about experiences that has influence the way you currently relate yourself to your artworks?**

I was adopted as a baby and I think this has made me incredibly self reliant which sometimes is very helpful when I'm trying to complete a project of either curating or completing a specific painting. I always used to draw when I was younger but I was discouraged from following my art instincts. Finding my biological mother and discovering that she was an artist released my passion for art. I guess the floodgates poured out. I think this has certainly influenced me, it was finally okay to follow my dream. My second daughter could draw before she could write her name and we would just sit and draw together for hours. I feel all of my life experience helps express different ideas in each painting. And experiencing loss gives rise to creative outlet, as a release perhaps.

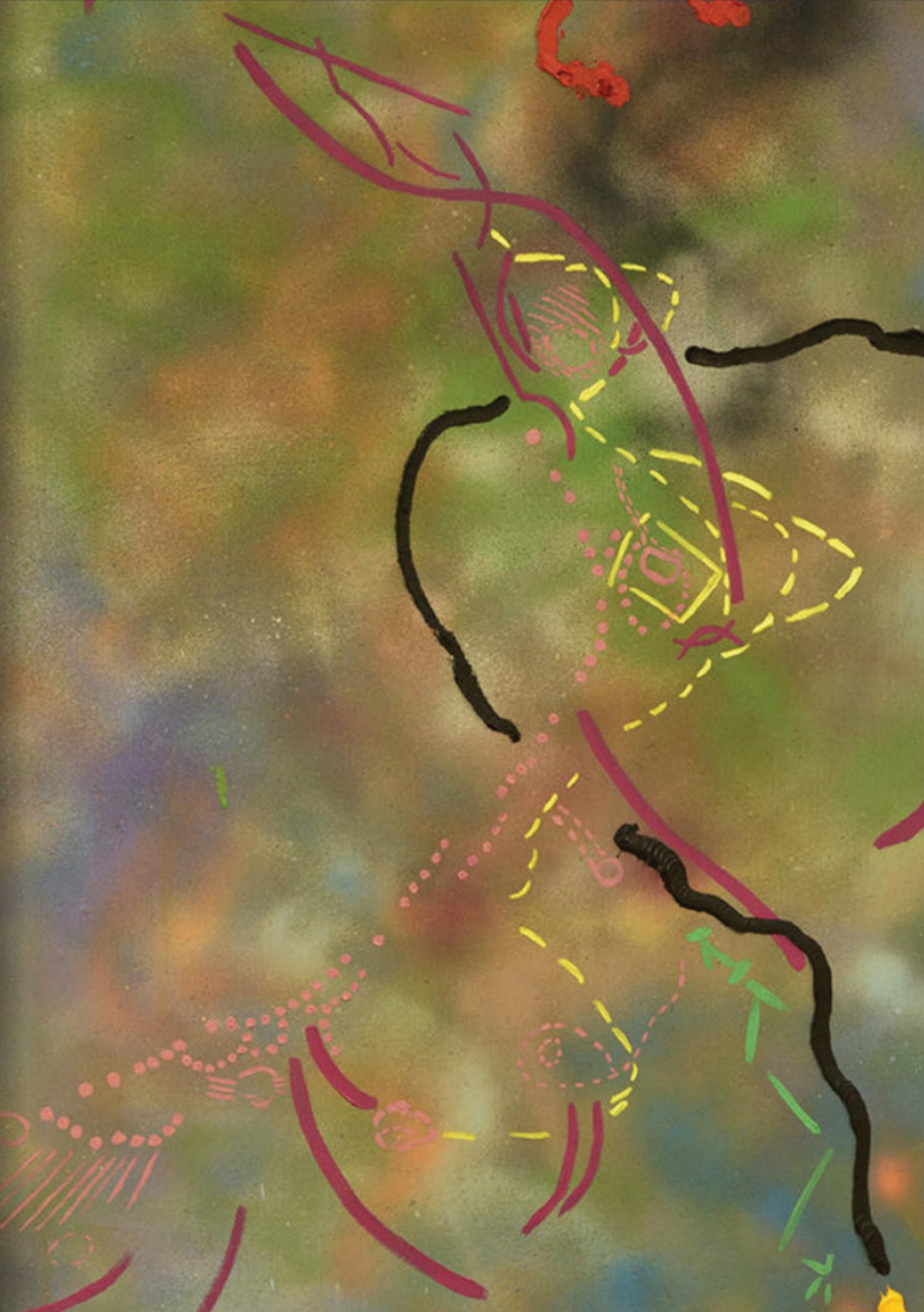
**Could you identify a specific artwork that has influenced your artistic practice or has impacted the way you think about race and**

**ethnic identity in visual culture?**

Well the very first painting made by Michelangelo titled The Torment of Saint Anthony has certainly influenced my artistic practice. It's just visually enthralling, the colors and composition, which Michelangelo took (borrowed) from Martin Schongauer. The demons in the painting seem so completely alien to life now and yet so central to how the world has become. The circular swirling seems to echo the constant never-ending power plays in the globe. I feel that the demons, which I've incorporated into my own paintings, are a metaphor for what we cannot understand: other people or other cultures. Unpredictability frightens people and the demons are something that used to be used to frighten people in the middle ages/early Renaissance, almost crowd control if you will. Today the evil surrounding us has no face and I feel that we need a central human identity to tackle it together.

**Your process can be perceived like you transform your experiences into your artwork, we are curious, what is the role of memory in your artistic productions? We are particularly interested if you try to achieve a faithful translation of your previous experiences or if you rather use memory as starting point to create.**

I am intrigued by the use of collective memory in terms of cultural history and mining art history to find new ways to translate messages into paint. Each painting becomes an exercise in historical research and discovering different modes of artistic expression in order to tell a story. Yet the difficulty lies in telling a subtle story, finding a way to create an interesting painting visually and yet still incorporating different painterly language if that makes any sense. Mostly all this is simply a starting point because once I start the painting it becomes what it wants, often taking a (sometimes completely!) different direction than originally envisioned. I have a mental image in my head of what I want to achieve and the process takes over and then I go down another path and the fun is to see where it leads. Some paintings are completed in one sitting, very easily painted. Yet other paintings take years, and it's me that needs to have the knowledge to complete it. Sometimes I have a flash of inspiration and know exactly what a piece will need to make it complete and this can occur anytime. Memory plays a huge role in all this.



**Multidisciplinarity seems to be a crucial aspect of your art practice and you seem to be in an incessant search of an intimate symbiosis between different disciplines. While crossing the borders of different artistic fields have you ever happened to realize that a symbiosis between disciplines is the only way to achieve fullness of your expression? Have you noticed yourself patterns or motives that echoes in your artworks regardless the discipline?**

I'm definitely searching for ways to bring together different disciplines, ways to express different time and history and I feel bringing together alternate modes of art making can sometimes achieve this. I don't always cross disciplines. I want each painting to have more than just one message, I'd like to have it express several things all at the same time. Drawing makes one think of a specific time in history as does spray painting which feels very recent and street oriented to me. The palette for my paintings is specific also, limited by certain tubes of paint which includes no black. If I need a black/dark color I mix it myself. My hope is that the colors can transport one to a specific time in art history as well. Finding patterns in the spray paint or collaging it together with actual pieces of paper, old school, is sometimes a great starting point. I photograph my collages and look, I feel that I'm always looking and looking. I don't always cross fields but have no compunction to stay within any bounds. Crossing the boundaries between disciplines can also create a juxtaposition that I want in a piece, sometimes it can be jarring like a wrong musical note but in exactly the right place for ultimate effect.

**Your paintings refer to the world that wants to be hidden, there are several versions underneath what we see with our naked eye. We are wondering if one of the hidden aims of Art could be to search the missing significance to a non-place... We are convinced that some information and ideas are hidden or even encrypted in the environment we live in, so we need to find a way to decipher them. I wonder if you agree with a statement that one of the Artists role would be to reveal unexpected sides of Nature, especially of our inner Nature?**

I agree with you that much is hidden from us and think sometimes maybe we just need to learn how to see

actively. Aside from the obvious political power struggles and abuse of power which are mostly hidden from public eyes, our personal inner side mostly does not reveal itself. We keep our rawest thoughts or feelings buried way deep inside ourselves and when it pops out suddenly it can be frightening. I think a lot of great art speaks to that issue. I can see a work of art and it will bother me, sometimes deeply. It's great really because I know I had a raw reaction to the piece and it makes me think about what is it exactly that bothers me so much. I saw a painting by John Currin and the woman in the painting has a green shoe on her foot and it's unbelievable how much the exact color green and the shape of the shoe bother me. It's so disturbing! I love it and feel that it is a hidden message and it makes you work as a conscious viewer. I'm hoping to achieve some level of this in my own work.

**Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Susan. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?**

I've been working on new map paintings. Right now I'm excited to be working on a new map painting that is a transparent overlay on top of another painting of an MRI of a brain scan which inverts the left and right sides of the brain. The image is still visible but amorphous underneath the map. The barely visible brain creates a sense of space underneath the sharp focus map lines. Maps are something we don't think twice about anymore because we all have them on our smartphones yet maps used to be handmade only for the wealthy. I guess I hope to see my work evolve to balance darkness with whimsical. The world seems so very unstable and dark and yet there is still so much beauty to celebrate, I'd like to find a way to juxtapose this in my work. Thank you so much for the interview!



