

WW Medium

Chance and Chaos: In the Studio with Jaq Chartier

A glimpse into Seattle Art Fair Host Committee member and featured artist, Jaq Chartier's world of experimentation

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Seattle Art Fair



Jaq Chartier varnishes a painting she is preparing for Seattle Art Fair. Her main body of work explores testing mixtures of inks, dyes and stains.

As Jaq Chartier pulls drops of ink across a white wood panel, she creates shapes that resemble strands of DNA. She repeats this motion, switching glass eye droppers, over and over until the board is covered. The end product, to Chartier, becomes a chart.

At an intersection of art and science, the Seattle artist studies the chemistry of inks, dyes and stains.

"I'm not interested in painting about something else," she said. "I'm interested in the materials. To keep myself interested I have to be learning all the time."

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Chartier's testing process ultimately derived from a teaching experience, though. While freelancing as a technical instructor for Golden Artist Colors, artists often asked questions about how to use materials, she said. So, Chartier compiled sample boards, testing the products under a selection of variables.

One of her first "bleed-test boards" still hangs on the wall of her studio — a testament to the evolution of her work.

"I keep it around because it's so rough," she said. "Everything about it is not self-conscious at all, it wasn't trying to be a painting. So, I keep that in mind. The real painting is the one that isn't really a painting."



Chartier's studio contains hundreds of small bottles of mixed inks. She tests and labels each accordingly.

Chartier works by this mantra consistently. Each painting features hundreds of blurbs of color, affected distinctively, as they originated from an unique homemade formula.

While traditional, archival materials ensure stability, the stains the artist creates transform due to a plethora of factors, such as humidity, time and light. In order to pinpoint the source the alteration, she tests the mixtures on a panel — drawing extended oval shapes in linear columns, like gel electrophoresis, or something inside a petri dish.

After covering the surface in a vibrant assortment of inks, she coats the panel in a variety of white spray paints — each impacting the inks differently. This step resembles a Polaroid photo coming to life — developing from light into color, she said. The resin buries essentially all imagery on the panel, and over a few days, color rises to the surface, some more so than others.

"I have to be able to work with a certain amount of chance and chaos," Chartier said. "If it did exactly what I thought, I'd be bored. I really like that element of experimentation and risk."



But, not every aspect of the painting comes with risk. Chartier labels each ink, row by row. She pencils in notes on the sides of a piece, as well as inside a sketchbook, where she draws a mini color-coded replica of the painting.

While the paintings may never truly be finished in the artist's mind, viewers will witness the tests in action at Seattle Art Fair with Woodside Braseth Gallery. A veteran of the fair, Chartier recognizes the impact an event of its capacity can have.



Detailed notes for one of Chartier's paintings.

She advocates for artists as a member of the Seattle Art Fair Host Committee, where her efforts go toward integrating local artists outside of the realm of the fair — those who are equally as worthy of attention, she said.

Chartier is practiced in these determinations. As a response to Art Basel in Miami, Chartier pioneered the Aqua Fair, which brought West Coast artists to the scene. A fair in Seattle provides similar opportunities for local artists and galleries, she said.

"We need to support local galleries if we want to have a thriving arts scene," she said. "People are here, the money is here, it's just not connecting as well as it could be."

Chartier said she hopes, over time, Seattle Art Fair will be that bridge.

Find Chartier's works with Woodside Braseth Gallery in booth D18.