HAYAL POZANTI: In the Studio with Hayal Pozanti
Written by Claude Smith, February 19, 2014

Introducing Hayal Pozanti

On a snowy January morning, we met Turkish-born Yale MFA grad Hayal Pozanti at her Queens studio for a tour of the space, and a first look at the paintings her gallerist Jessica Silverman will debut at The Armory Show in March. On the heels of two solo exhibitions in November—at DUVE Berlin and Susanne Vielmetter in Los Angeles—Pozanti was in the middle of this new work, which, at the time of our visit, existed solely as blank wooden panels. It was the perfect occasion for a start-to-finish rundown of her process and an explanation of the bold, interlocking abstract compositions that have recently caught the discerning eye of the art world. From the language of unique shapes she's invented—a 31-letter "alphabet" from which many of her forms are derived, to the considerations behind the shape of her paintings, which are square, like an Instagram icon, or rectangular, like an iPhone 5—Pozanti talked us through the realization of her work and a day in the life of one of New York's emerging art stars.

Process and Concept: Process, Beginning to End

"I start by drawing by hand then putting that into the computer. Then I'll make many different iterations on the computer, and I'll print it out. Sometimes I'll print it out and collage it, and then put it back in. After that, when I'm happy with the composition, I'll print it out on acetate paper. I have an old projector and I'll project it onto whatever I'm going to

paint—typically wood. I've worked on dye bond, too, but I like the texture of wood better. It absorbs the water-based paints. So I gesso it and sand it, and then I paint on it."

The Alphabet- I wanted to come up with shapes, icons, or logos as a language or alphabet—which I narrowed down to 31 shapes. I have been using that alphabet now for almost two years. However, nothing will repeat itself. I'm really interested in and invested in this idea of creating an individual, or unique, shape, or a unique icon or logo every time I make a painting. I'm not that interested in repetition."

Studies for The Armory Show Series- "I didn't use the alphabet for these, but instead I got these cards and just free-sketched everything that came out. I limited myself to 20 sketches, and then I photographed them and put them into the computer. However, these are not that far from the alphabet I created. When you learn a language, you start drawing the A, and the B, and the C. And now when I create, when I do it by freehand, they're also referring to the alphabet; they're similar. They're almost the same shapes, but now I'm able to draw them out by hand, because I've gotten so accustomed to them."

Support Shapes

"I first started painting on square panels. At the time I was thinking about icons in programs like Twitter or Facebook—they're all in a square format—and then Instagram came along. I'd never thought of it at that time, but I'm really interested in this idea of how works of art look on screens, and how they're distributed through our image system. So my paintings were like icons for an imaginary system or an imaginary world. I hadn't worked on square panels for a long time. I used panels in the proportions of the iPhone 4 for a while, and then iPhone 5. But I wanted to go back to the square format."

Colors

"I usually finalize it on the computer. But once I print it out the colors will change dramatically, because screen colors and real-life colors aren't the same. I don't want to mimic the screen colors. Instead, I use colors that I mix myself (I don't buy my paints); and I think my natural inclination in mixing colors goes towards more earth tones. Once I feel comfortable with the colors, then the painting is done. And for that to happen, it usually takes many, many layers of over-coloring. I'll play with hues of color, mostly grays and dark earth tones. I like them to have a particular mood to them."

Digital-based art to painting

"I could say that I learned how to make things on a computer first before making things by hand. I've been drawing and painting since I was very little, but my undergrad experience was more digital-based. So I learned how to program, make things on a computer, and use digital photography; it was more about using digital media to create. But that eventually created another frustration in that I wanted things to come out of the computer; I felt a sense of disconnect. And I was making work that was more about appropriating images. I

was just, to put it very bluntly, addicted to the internet, and collecting all kinds of images and making collages from those. But once I started becoming invested in abstraction and not wanting to appropriate things, I didn't see a need to rely on the computer so much. I didn't want to become like a slave to the machine. I believe also that as humans, we have a unique capability of creating things, whereas machine-generated things always rely on the program that you're using. So it's down to whoever created that program that generates the outcome or the outlook of what you've produced."

Inspiration

"I'm a bit of a nerd, so I'll just be reading and looking at a lot of things. I like reading a lot about technological theory; that's the main source of inspiration for me. Visually, I like graphic things. I enjoy looking at how, through history, human beings have communicated with each other visually. That might mean looking at icons, alphabets, or very basic prehistoric ways of creating. I am interested in this idea of communicating, an idea through a single image."

Music

"I listen to music all the time in the studio. Because I'm doing physical work, I listen to a lot of energetic, electronic music, and a lot of house. [Laughs]. Right now I'm listening to some garage from, like, end of the '90s/beginning of 2000s, just something that's very upbeat. And I'll sometimes dance in the studio. It's really about enjoying my physical presence in the world and enjoying what I'm making."

Working hours

"I like to work in the mornings, because my studio gets such beautiful light. I don't like painting under artificial light."