

VULTURE

"Loie Hollowell Wants to Be the Amy Schumer of Abstract Art"

By Hilary Reid

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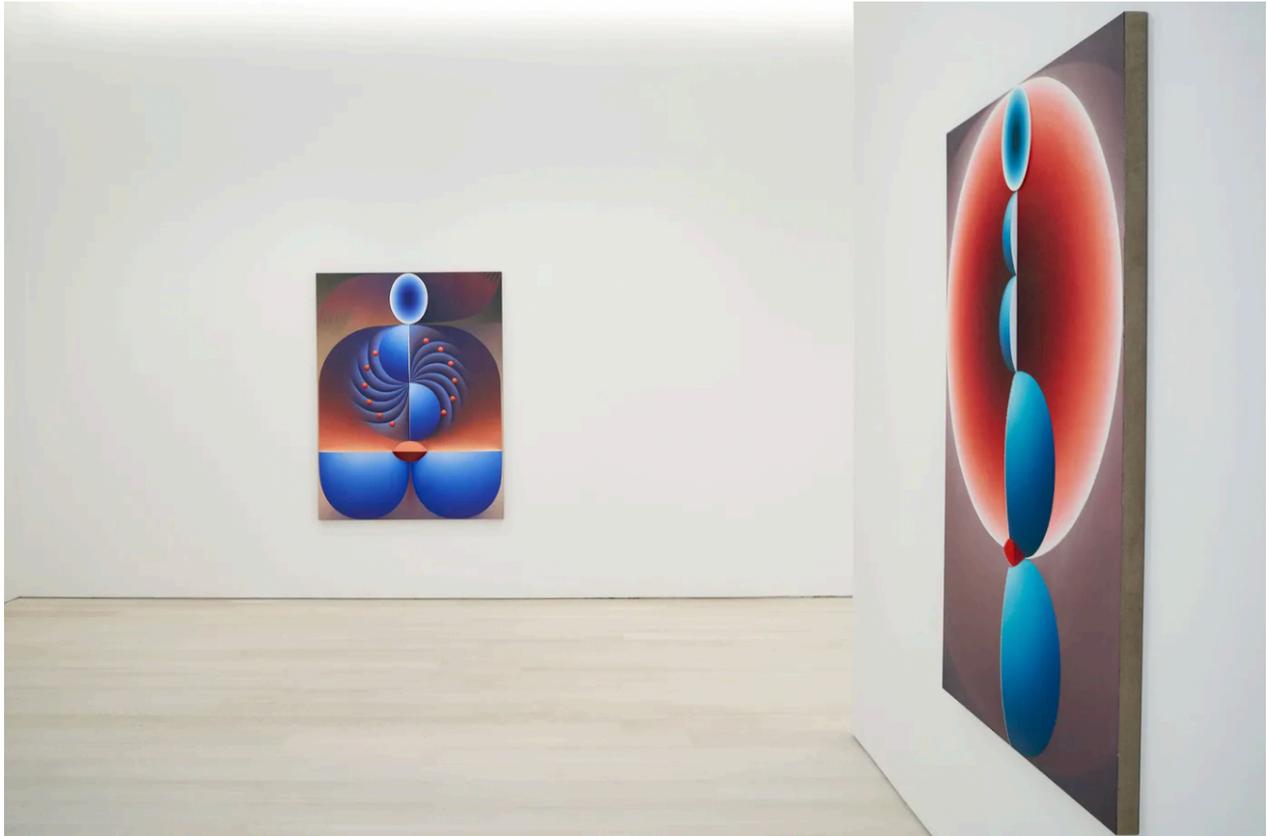


Photo: Melissa Goodwin, Courtesy of Pace Gallery

"My friend just went into labor!" is what [Loie Hollowell](#) greets me with at the door of her Ridgewood, Queens, art studio. "We were on the phone and she said water was trickling down her leg, and I was like, *Dude, your water is breaking.*"

Hollowell had her first child not all that long ago, and she made paintings inspired by it; the body is never very distant from her colorful, a little bit mystical abstract paintings. Her work is often compared to that of of Judy Chicago, Hilma af Klint, and especially Georgia O'Keeffe, and its kinship with these blue-chip feminist abstractionists might have something to do with why she has become one of the most successful young artists in New York right now. But its also frank and funny about sex and of course travels well on Instagram. Many of her paintings reference her sex life with her husband, sculptor Brian Caverly: "I have made a bazillion paintings that are just of his penis, all of these lingams," Hollowell tells me. "I make them over and over again in a million colors."

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Vaginas are symbolized by a glowing almond shape, and orgasms are squiggly lines and shapes that radiate with light.

Her latest show, "Plumb Line," which helps inaugurate Pace Gallery's big new West Chelsea HQ — which feels much more like a museum than a gallery — opens on September 14. This time, Hollowell shifts away from depictions of her sex life and focuses on one of its results. "There's no penises, it's all me," she says of the paintings. The nine works represent Hollowell's body during pregnancy, while giving birth, and postpartum. "I'm thinking of them as portraits of myself," she says. Only two of the works that will be in the Pace show are still in Hollowell's studio when I visit, and each is in bright and rich colors that call to mind the cover of a 1970s sci-fi novel. Her work is easy to imagine living with, which might be why so many collectors have been lining up to buy her paintings. Glowing orbs and concentric circles fill the canvases, punctuated with 3-D high-density foam pieces. The works abstract the artist's body into something resembling the solar system. "I felt like my body was just so singular and present and kind of alone doing its thing during the pregnancy and the birth that I had to make a monument to it, or something," Hollowell says.

The planets have aligned for Hollowell: In 2015, a *New York Times* review of her solo show at the now-closed 106 Green gallery in Greenpoint predicted as much: "The next time you see Loie Hollowell's paintings it will probably not be in a small, artist-run gallery in someone's apartment that is open only on Sundays or by appointment ... Ms. Hollowell is a gifted painter, and her work could easily reach larger audiences soon," wrote Martha Schwendener. Pace Gallery announced that it would represent Hollowell in January 2017, and has since put on solo shows of her work in their Palo Alto and London locations. The Palo Alto show sold out, as did Pace's offerings of Hollowell's abstract pastels at Frieze, which Bloomberg reported, in an article naming Hollowell as part of a "hot-artist wave," sold out in under 40 minutes. So it makes sense Pace is having her works amongst the offerings at their multi-gallery new art galleria. Hollowell knows this: "It feels like the big one," she tells me on the Friday morning that I visit her studio. There's an undeniable anticipatory vibe in the air that day. The doorbell rings four times in the hour I'm there, and each time Hollowell apologizes profusely and springs up to answer. We run back and forth to her computer several times to look at reference points for her work — Renaissance cartoons, Italian futurist Giacomo Balla's "Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash," Neotrantric Indian painter Gulam Rasool Santoosh — and to a wall where several pastel sketches of the pieces included in the Pace show hang. The pastels are a part of Hollowell's process, and include notes in the margins to guide her as she works ("Radiating from my core," "Nipples are as bright as semicircles," and "Pregnant and having to pee all the time," are a few that I notice).

The pastel sketches include the five elements — "head, boob, belly, butt, mandorla," Hollowell ticks them off — that are then used in her final works. The "mandorla," Italian for "almond," has become a regular feature in Hollowell's paintings. "It's some religious, Catholic symbol and you see it in a lot of Gothic cathedrals and shit, but it's such a cool shape for a vagina," she says. I ask if there is spiritualism in her work — similar to that of Hilma af Klint, who used symbols to commune with spirits. "I'm into thinking about the practice of making art as a spiritual practice," Hollowell tells me. "I guess if life itself is a spiritual endeavor, or sex itself is a spiritual practice of meeting God in an

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act of living, or meeting God in an act of having sex, then I guess what I'm doing is spiritual because I am synthesizing those experiences through my hands and into the work."

Hollowell was conceived at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program — the same Roswell of UFO fame. She says her parents, artists David and Terry Hollowell, "like to talk about that." Hollowell's father, a now-retired professor of painting and drawing at UC Davis, showed his figurative paintings in New York galleries in the late '80s and '90s, but his career there was short-lived. "My dad is definitely very cautious of the New York art world because I think he feels like he was kind of spurred by it," Hollowell says. "His work was selling because it was a time period when the work fit what was going on at the moment. But then he changed his work and the gallery wanted to stop working with him and didn't let him change."

I ask Hollowell if the fickleness of collecting trends concerns her, as well. "Definitely," she says. "I think art goes in cycles. Right now there's a real push to support women and women making descriptive imagery and illustrative imagery and personal imagery in painting, and these cycles go — what five years, ten years, I mean not even, like two years, three years — so I've accepted that ... Keeping costs low is really important," Hollowell says. "Just in case." She would like her new body of work to be "more universal" to viewers, too. Hollowell cites comedians Amy Schumer, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, and Ali Wong as some of her "main inspirations." "These women are just doing exactly what I want to do with painting. They're just being so honest, but universal," Hollowell says. "It's like they're super honest, but not being aggressive about it — they're not excluding men. They're being like, *Isn't this hilarious, listen to my story.*"

["Plumb Line"](#) opens September 14 at Pace Gallery, 540 W. 25th St., 2nd fl.

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