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"There Is Always That Hunting': See How Artist Loie Hollowell's Bodily Abstractions Reach for the Light Even When Confronting Dark Subjects"

By Artnet News

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Production still from the Art21 "New York Close Up" film, "Loie Hollowell's Transcendent Bodies." © Art21, Inc. 2021.

Loie Hollowell is known for her visceral, bodily abstractions—three-dimensional paintings that draw from her personal experiences as a woman. But for a new exhibition at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis, the U.S. artist is showing a new series of soft pastel drawings.

Produced in 2020 and 2021, these works are also mediations on her experiences of pregnancy, birth, and the profound effects the pandemic has on the body.

In an exclusive interview shot last year as part of the film series "New York Close Up," which focuses on early-career artists working in New York, Hollowell talks about her technique of building up paint on canvas to create multidimensional sinuous forms through which she is able to capture universal bodily experiences like sensuality, desire, and pain.

"I'm a body experiencing desire, experiencing pleasure," she said of how these works grow out of herself. "It is sensual and needy and dirty and expressive."

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

"I grew up in California surrounded by Light and Space artists," she recalled of her early inspirations. "Robert Irwin and his beautiful discs, with this line in between. Experiencing pure light, pure space, pure emotion. There's always that hunting, that searching for a light-filled experience, even if it's a dark subject matter."

"When I started diving deep into creating three-dimensional spaces on my paintings," she added, "I was now having to deal with illusory space and real space—constructed shadow and constructed light versus real light and real shadow."

"What I've found that I love about having a painting that in reality is a sculpture is that it changes within each context, within each space that it's hung."

"Around my late twenties, I got pregnant and I did not want to keep the baby. I had an abortion," she said of the way real life has long informed her art. "The emotional experience and the fallout of the relationship were pretty emotionally intense. I wanted to figure out how to make paintings about it."

"I started making, basically, portraits of my vagina and ovaries, trying to depict the experience of having the abortion. I realized the abstraction can hold within it that sensation or that emotion by its color, its composition, its texture." Her latest pastel works are an extension of this meditation about women's reproductive experiences, but have shifted focus to the pains and joys of pregnancy and birth.

*Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21's series New York Close Up, below.*

*"[Loie Hollowell: Tick Tock Belly Clock](#)" is on view through May 8, 2023, at Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis*

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