

RIOT MATERIAL

"An Interview with Pae White"

By Amadour

January 19, 2023



Pae White, *RUBEDO JUBILEE*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo: Marten Elder.

Artist Pae White captivates her audience with a solo exhibition, *Slow Winter Sun*, at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco, featuring new monochromatic paper-clay paintings on wood, iridescent ceramic sculptures, and tapestries. Timed in proximity to the city's FOG Design+Art Fair, this show centers on the relationship between humanity, nature, and technology. We discuss the artist's connection to California, her shapeshifting materials, and her processes in the studio.

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AMADOUR: In the press release, there is a mention of the Northern California town of Sea Ranch. I recently visited for the first time and can see a visual connection between your work and the Sea Ranch Chapel by artist and architect James Hubbell. Why is this a noteworthy place for you?

PAE WHITE: That's where I am right now! I started coming here as a kid in the seventies. Are you familiar with an artist named Millard Sheets? He influenced me and created watercolors, bronzes, architecture, textiles, and furniture. He was up here, and my best friend was his granddaughter. Her parents had a house at Sea Ranch, and he was 20 minutes away. I painted with him and saw how an artist works professionally, as somebody who's got a studio and travels. As a kid, that blew my mind. Sea Ranch's magic and the forest's profound depth, combined with open fields and a wild, crazy ocean, are magnificent. The priority is the deer, the animals, the sea, and the seals. Humans are secondary to nature at Sea Ranch.



*Pae White, Langston, Bertha, Solomon, Miguel, Stefan, Flo, Barnaby, Oswald, Esther, 2023.
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo, Phillip Maisel.*

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AMADOUR: There are also no street lights, and they try to hide all the lights so you can see the night sky.

WHITE: The architecture's so unique. They are like these geodes where they're rough on the outside, then you go inside, and there are folds and bends that open up in these kinds of jewel-like forms. It's always resonated with me. At Sea Ranch, they appreciate the place's rules and rigor.

AMADOUR: Didn't architect Al Boeke create the iconic wooden homes in Sea Ranch that influenced many 1970s-era homes across the United States? [Boeke was the first in a group of architects, including Charles Moore, Joseph Esherick, William Turnbull Jr., Donlyn Lyndon, Richard Whitaker, and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, to design Sea Ranch.]

WHITE: Well, all these guys Boeke brought up were top architects and the heads of their departments at Berkeley and Yale. They disseminated the ethos of coexistence between land and architecture. Where are you from?

AMADOUR: I'm from Sausalito and Reno, Nevada, so I grew up pretty close.

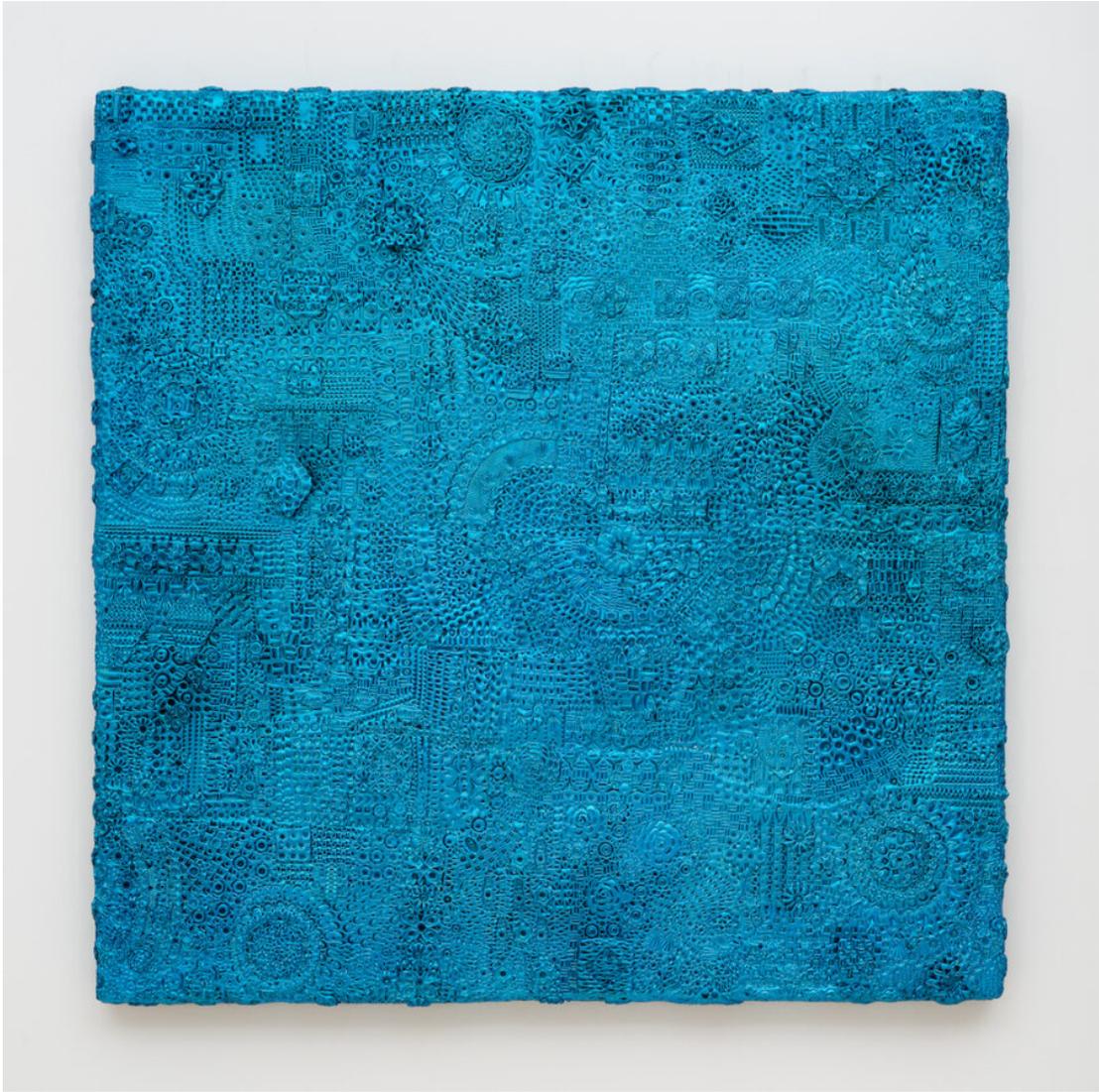
WHITE: Wow, that's a fascinating combination.

AMADOUR: Where did you grow up?

WHITE: I'm from Pasadena. I still live in Southern California, in East Los Angeles. During the pandemic I stayed put when everybody else moved out of the city. The Pasadena Art Museum, now the Norton Simon Museum, is hugely important to me. It also exhibited Marcel Duchamp for the first time in the United States [Duchamp's retrospective was held from October 8 to November 3, 1963]. They had art classes for children, and I took a lot of lessons there. Andy Warhol and DeWain Valentine had shows too. I own a book called California Design Ten, Pasadena Art Museum. Sometimes they had artworks, but one of the things they did for these great catalogs, and like I said, if you can find one, buy it, they would take the objects out into areas of Pasadena and photograph them. So there might be a chest of drawers, and they photographed them in a park. Designers Stan Bitters, and Evelyn and Jerome Ackerman are also there.

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Pae White, *I am cyan*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo, Phillip Maisel.

AMADOUR: Intricate patterns make the surface appear like tapestries in [Luminium](#) (2023) and *I am cyan* (2023). Can you tell me more about the materiality?

WHITE: That's so interesting that you say that because I refer to them as paper tapestries, which are made of Japanese paper clay that air dries. It's benign and nontoxic and takes impressions well. In the studio, we lay out the paper clay and then, in sections, imprint the surface. We do this with the end of a highlighter, batteries, nontraditional clay tools, and objects that might have some vague recognizability. These kinds of overlays feel like textiles. Then the pieces are treated by someone I work with who does automotive finishes. He's a hot rod painting guy, and we work on developing colors together. While these are all monochrome, he and I have worked on multicolor pieces. The surfaces of these works can look like a giant piece of bronze but are just kid-friendly clay. Something fundamental and humble transforms into something new.

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AMADOUR: In *Undoing Done* (2023), a ceramic iridescent serpent coils around a wooden block column. What led you to juxtapose these two materials?

WHITE: The serpents are glazed ceramics put in a chamber. The chamber is very limited in size, and it's a process called Physical Vapor Deposition or PVD. There's a substrate made of different metals. The high-pressure, high-heat chamber conditions create a vapor coating I baked into it. It's always a surprise because of the sub-glaze. If we use a red sub-glaze and put an emerald PVD, it will look different than if we used a black sub-glaze. It's always a surprise and learning experience for us, a metamorphosis. The corporate geometry of the walnut plinth is meant to contrast with the color-shifting curve.

AMADOUR: You also have similar curvatures with the snail tracks in *Tule trails* (2022) and *doing done* (2022), which are tapestries made of cotton, polyester, and Trevira.

WHITE: Exactly. These were a challenge as this heavy-duty industrial loom produces them. I want the tapestries to feel like they are made by hand or very slowly and methodically. We use a Jacquard machine loom, which could make a mile of this fabric if given a chance to do that. The snails feel like someone dusted their trails in person on the surface with a powder.

AMADOUR: When I look at *platonian* (2023), I keep thinking about what obsolescence means and how something can shift within its usability. These works evoke a computer board. What is your view of technology?

WHITE: When I was in art school, Apple offered significantly reduced computer equipment rates. I remember it was costly to get a monitor that had 256 colors. I often would find myself going deep into the computer, understanding the systems and utilities, and breaking it. It has come back into my practice. We use programming for the tapestries, and the loom is a computer. We create software that can randomize, like distribution software. We set up the parameters, density, and shifts, and then the software can spit out 200 million options. That would be a massive pain for me to go through and find my favorite, so the most we've ever generated is 5,000 options. And then, I go through until I find the right one to determine threads that will work within a particular slot of the loom. It takes hours to get all that done.

AMADOUR: There is also a textual component in your works. Do any of these alphabetical components mean anything specific?

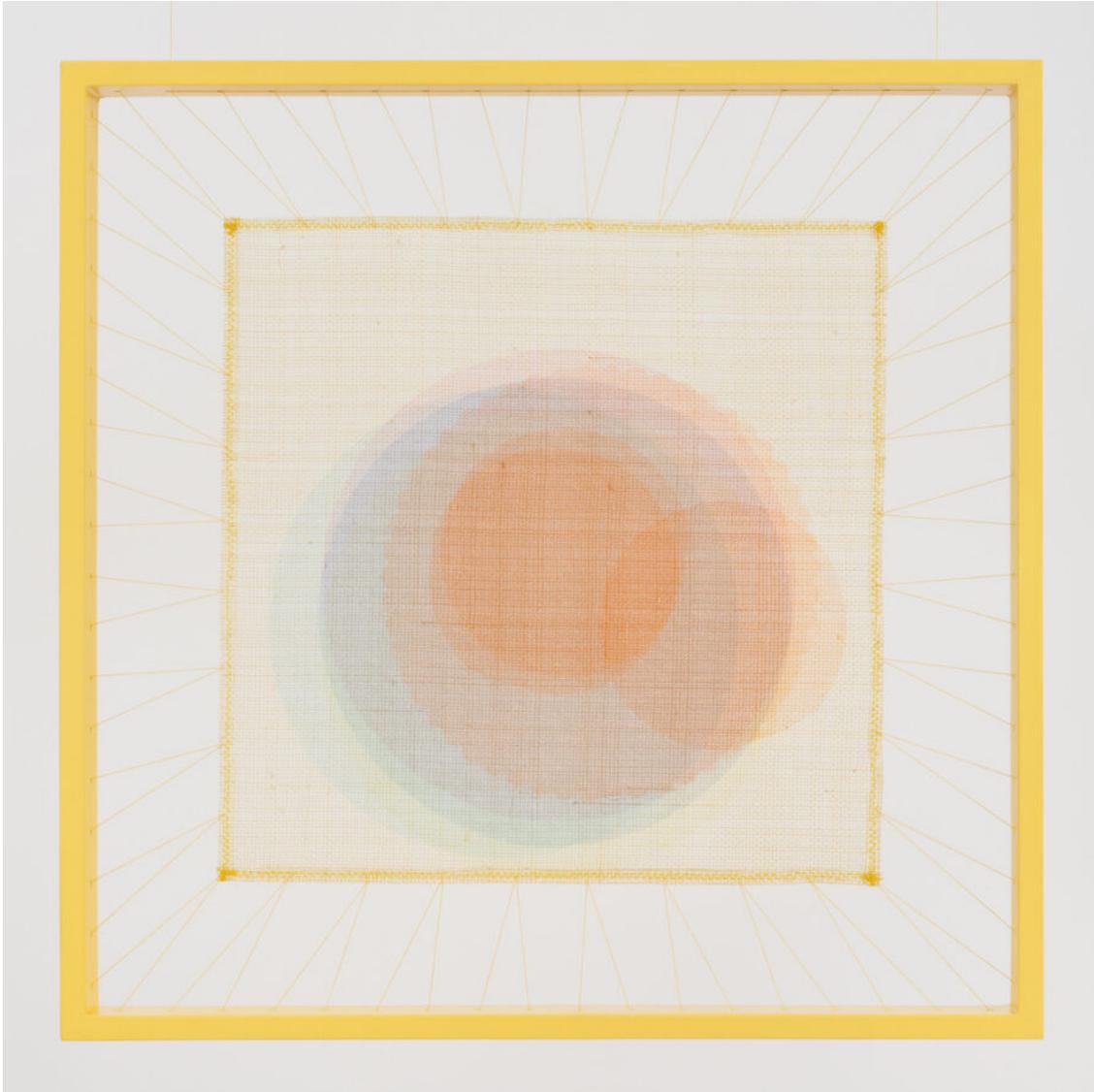
WHITE: I use a typeface called Bovine, which I also use in large-scale installations. It's robust but incredibly neutral and sculptural. It's random. I want a sense of noise or chatter. I like to engage the viewer in a way where they might search for words and keep them looking longer at a piece.

AMADOUR: They feel legible in some instances, resembling those jumbled puzzles where you have to find a word that foreshadows the next thing that will happen in your life.

WHITE: I wish! Then I'd be strategic with placement. The only word I've seen that seemed to come close was "B-Day," like a birthday. I was surprised, but it just disappeared on the surface.

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