

Jane Callister *Velocity*

September 8 – November 4, 2007

Faster AbEx... Kill, Kill, Kill!

PAINTER AND SOMETIME INSTALLATION ARTIST, JANE CALLISTER HAS A PLAY DATE WITH ART HISTORY. Their favorite game has fairly loose rules, with points earned for problem-solving and involves the innovative reconciliation of nature and manufacture, painting and installation, movement and structure, the body and the landscape, form and content, momentum and inertia, the traditional and the untested, and a few things that inevitably come up along the way.

Looking at the exuberant and precisely crafted elements of *Velocity*, one is indeed hard pressed to know whether to refer to them as paintings or installations, for in a very real sense they are both, and neither simultaneously. Her process is a physically complex and labor-intensive series of stages wherein she begins by creating various shapes—oversized drips, poolings, splashes, and blobs—one at a time. Primarily made of poured, hand-mixed paint, Callister utilizes a process analogous to individual brush marks rendered at 200 times the size of most strokes in slow-motion, more patient than molasses. These elements are then assembled into what would have been paintings, but for the force of the mysterious pixelating explosion that has apparently flung their parts all around the room.

Aside from being sensual, vibrant, and curious objects, these works flaunt the good-spirited trauma of their birth in their finished forms, intriguing viewers and making them yearn to play along. The artist and I exchanged some days of correspondence as I investigated her intentions and process for this essay, an approach which is so utterly unique as to make the words she

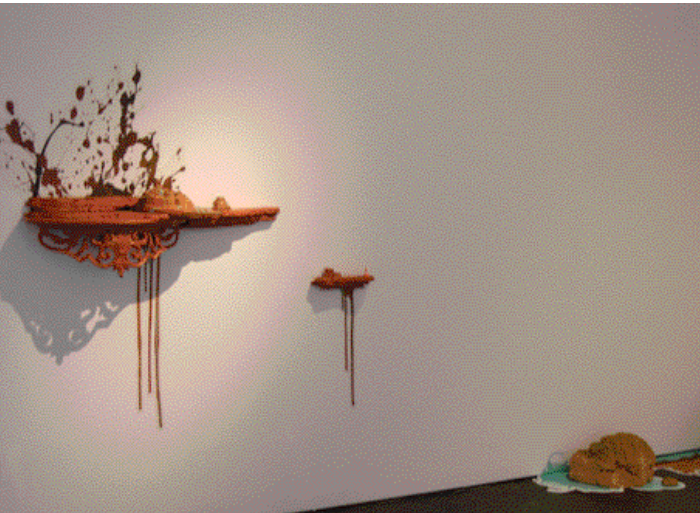


Photo: Jane Callister

Velocity, 2007 (detail)
Poured paint and mixed media
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Center panel:
Velocity, 2007 (detail)
Poured paint and mixed media
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

herself chooses sing with the evocation of her high-minded yet humorous aesthetic. Excerpts from our correspondence follow; let's all play.

Shana Nys Dambrot: To what degree would you say that the pouring techniques you use to make the “stickers” emerged from the kind of approaches to abstraction you were using before their inception? In other words was it an outgrowth, an extension, or a clean split with regard to your previous work to that point?

Jane Callister: I would say pretty much all my work is generated from previous work or ideas, as a way of extending or sometimes diverting from them, but always in relation. Specifically, these new “paint stickers” followed a previous series of paintings and installations featuring low-relief drips cascading down canvases and walls, in which I mixed thickeners with acrylic (such as latex and spackle) so that the monochrome paint resembled melting ice cream or dancing

whipped cream slathered on the surface. Those pieces were very tactile and decadent and in one installation from 1999 (which incidentally was my first solo project at CAF) I combined projections of digital video (recordings of me pouring thickened paint on canvas), which were then manipulated to correspond to a soundtrack of digitized liquid noises. The walls were skinned with sheetrock to protect the under-layer so I could pour and draw into the viscous mixture directly on the walls. One side had a

carved foam sculpture of a gravity-defying horizontal drip and there were other sculptural elements on the walls and floor too. The whole thing was like walking inside an animated musical painting; I even had vanilla essence hidden in nooks to add odor to the sensory overload.

As for how the current “stickers” evolved, one of the problems with the previous installation was that the wall drips were made on-site and so were ripped out at the end of the show and thus destroyed. I wanted to figure out a way of making the drips more portable and

recyclable, so I experimented with a variety of consistencies and adhesives until I stumbled on the idea of pouring directly onto adhesive-backed material and cutting the shapes out. This then evolved into multicolored spills with less viscosity, allowing more variation in the thickness of lines and enabling curves, splashes and a greatly expanded vocabulary of forms.

This also coincided with another shift in terms of subject matter: the earlier paintings (and

to some extent the installations) seemed to naturally reference the human body, or at least movement and physicality; whereas these newly developing forms seemed instead to suggest landscapes and were more easily composed in spatial terms. Transcending the minimalist zip and vertical drip of the earlier work supported a significant shift away from the surface/body paradigm toward an implied physical space, opening up a whole new realm for the work to explore.

Photo: Jane Callister



This was not just a formal exercise though, as I think the form/content issue is inextricable, and that form itself conveys content regardless of the imagery depicted. For example we might read the mountains mutating into geometric abstractions as possible evocations of entropy or dissolution (suggested by the melting paint as it slips out of its construction as one image and into another more anarchic seeming image/object on the floor).

And this is not an altogether abject proposition. The mutability and gravity-defiance of the vertical drips climbing up and becoming clouds of pixels floating free could be read as a positive transformation. So I guess the mindset of the viewer will come into play in terms of interpreting the imagery; whether they see it as dissolution and decay or as life's organically shifting narrative that willfully diverts its own path. So I think there is a psychological element to it, as well as the obvious environmental references to things like toxic spills, uninhabited wastelands, mudslides etc. These environmental issues have in fact also been a continuing theme in my work for over ten years (well before the recent attention to global warming or the devastating tsunamis and earthquakes). Looking back now, I think I was originally using that imagery in my paintings to suggest a larger threat to humanity, something that transcends the often-petty politics of our everyday lives. So as exuberant and pleasurable as they were to make (and hopefully encounter) they were also tempered by a sense of potential pending disaster and pointed to the bigger picture of humanity's role in this larger context.

SND: And all the patterns of thought revert back to ideas about the flesh and the earth; the form and the

content are as inseparable as a dancer and the dance. Regarding art history I'm thinking both about action paintings like Jackson Pollock's and Pop art like Roy Lichtenstein's brushstroke paintings and sculptures; and also you mentioned Morris Louis and others.

JC: Yes absolutely, we might say tweaked through a kind of cartoonish, hyper-stylized, and chromatically saturated landscape. The paint itself is elusive even as it participates in the construction of its own illusion. The movement captured in the splash and pooling patterns mimics the forces of gravity and momentum and so forth.

SND: Then the next question is do you recreate that, or I should say how is it that you invite the natural forces into

Photo: Jane Callister



Velocity, 2007, (studio detail)
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

your process of making the paintings? Are they designed/controlled or random in the way the forms are generated/emerge?

JC: The answer is... yes to both, and neither. I set up the conditions (and admittedly have got better through practice) whereby I can closely predict what will happen when, but never completely. And that of course is

Special thanks to Dena Beard, Elizabeth Lovero, Wayne McCall, and CAF's supporters and volunteers.



Velocity, 2007 (detail of floor stickers w/rocks)
Dimensions variable
Poured paint on adhesive vinyl and carved foam sculptures
Courtesy the artist

Cover:
Velocity, 2007 (detail)
Poured paint and mixed media
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

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→ part of the pleasure and the frustration of my process. It's literally like the material has a mind of its own and we are collaborating, so it isn't always easy.

I have also been thinking about the relationship of these installation projects to my "usual" work and it occurred to me that the paintings are like the figuring out part (or the residue of my continually developing thought-process) and the installations are like a sudden contraction, whereby all the ideas I explore in the paintings solidify into multidimensional forms, inspired by the ideas I had initially been investigating solely in paint. So the installation work is a kind of culmination, as well as an extrapolation, in which the inclusion of other media to flesh out the ideas seemed appropriate at that time. Then I tend to go back to paint and begin the process again.

SND: Just like a fine game of hopscotch, or advanced Double Dutch jump rope with rhyming.

– *Interviewed by Shana Nys Dambrot, September 2007*

Shana Nys Dambrot is an art critic, curator and author based in Venice, CA. Her fine art and design reviews, features, and interviews have appeared in scores of publications including Modern Painters, Art Review, ARTnews, Whitehotmagazine.com, Kotori Magazine, tema celeste, Angeleno, Art Asia Pacific, Intersection, TimeOut LA, Juxtapoz and Coagula Art Journal. She is currently the LA Managing Editor at Flavorpill.net and a Contributing Editor at its affiliate publication Arkrush.com as well as at Artweek and Art Ltd. A complete account of her published books and articles can be found at sndx.net and she blogs daily at uber.com/snd.



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Photo: Wayne McCall



Lickerty-splat! 2007
Manipulated paint on adhesive vinyl
Installation view, 7 x 6 ft.
Courtesy the Artist
Commissioned by Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum

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Velocity



Bloom Projects

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