

## ARTISTS INTERVIEWING ARTISTS

The Clemente 2021 Open Studios

ELISABETH CONDON and KYLIE HEIDENHEIMER interview NICOLE PARCHER, January, 2021



Cake Fight, 2020, Mixed Media Installation, 3' x 5'



Fenced In, 2020, Oil Paint on Canvas, 36" x 48"



The Wrangler, 2020, Oil Paint on Canvas, 48" x 60"

**ELISABETH CONDON (EC):**

**Nicole, the shapes and colors in the paintings have a retro feel, like Shirley Jaffe, Stuart Davis, Patricia Treib, Jason Stopa, Raoul Dufy! Do you relate to a certain epoch historically? This is another way of asking about source material that inspires you, including other paintings. Felix Gonzales-Torres tells Robert Storr (1995) that “whatever I do is already something that has entered my brain from some other sources and is then synthesized into something new. I respect my elders and I learn from them.”**

**Nicole Parcher (NP):**

What an interesting group of artists to be linked with Elizabeth, it has been fun to look more closely at their works and see the connections. The recent Stuart Davis exhibition at the Whitney Museum was a pleasure to view. I spent a lot of time delighting in his use of patterns, shapes, line and movement. I think the retro feel in my paintings comes from one of my main source materials, old children’s books from the 50’s and 60’s. I originally found piles of these old books in my studio building, The Clemente, a former public school in New York City. I love the ugly greens, muted yellows and oranges, and beautiful black lines and patterns used in the illustrations. The presence of other artists is often felt in the studio, there is an unspoken dialogue that filters in and out during the creative process, but I am not directly referring to any specific artworks as a source material.

**Nicole, who are painters you love and inspirations for your work? Are you invested in originality or is prioritizing individuality irrelevant?**

NP: The paintings of Joan Mitchell and Phillip Guston will always make me swoon. Mitchell’s symphony of colors and expressive brush marks, the beautiful dance between chaos and order in her compositions. I have a visceral reaction to Guston’s use of thick juicy paint put on with such directness and emotion. Arturro Herra’s beautiful abstract collages inspired by cartoons, Jessica Stockholder’s sculptures that feel like paintings created with everyday objects. Rauschenberg’s incredible mixed media work, of course Willem de Kooning, Kandinsky, and Kurt Schwitters. Fernand Leger, Barry McGee, and Joan Snyder have also influenced and inspired my work.

I strive to take risks in my work, to not settle, to be unafraid of beauty, to embrace the awkward and ugly. I hope that my work has elements of originality and is fresh and unique to this moment and time in which I am creating.

**EC: From children's books to dime store props, play assumes a large role in your process. Can you talk about the exuberance in your work?**

NP: When I was a child my mother, who is also an artist, kept an art cabinet for us that was full of art materials, pencils, paints, colorful paper, recycled wrapping paper, ribbon, glitter, cardboard tubes, and stickers. I was inspired by these materials and encouraged to be creative. I still get very excited by materials and they are often the starting point to create a new body of work. I feel a real sense of delight in the sensual world around me and I think that exuberance, passion, and joy can be felt in my work. I love the freedom and spontaneity of starting new work and the play between lines, colors, and shapes.

**EC: Does it feel true to your process that quick and spontaneous drawings form a gateway between painting and installation; do the drawings inform the installations inform the paintings, or does one way of working inspire the other?**

NP: Working with collage and installation have a real physicality to them. The adding and subtracting of shapes to create painterly compositions. Letting drips of lines be made with streamers or rope for example. Creating oil paintings after working in mixed media compositions greatly affects the texture and content of the paintings. All three of these genres, painting, installation, and collage are in dialogue with one another and inform the choices I make.

**EC: Each work remains unpainted in areas, becoming more of an arrangement of gestures like collage, than a fully licked and covered painting. Can you talk about your working process?**

NP: This is a great description of how the collage and installation work affects the paintings. The 2-D work always starts on the floor, I move around the paper or canvas, I squat, I cut, I rip, I spill, I scrape, I glue, I try to be bold with big stokes of paint. The layering of paint, things hidden, surprises, contrasts, I'm trying to create a balance between chaos and order, a beautiful tension between the colors and shapes. Eventually the work gets hung on the wall and I continue the process, stepping back and forth, the dance of creating.

**EC: The work has a melancholic cast and also a political one in its use of everyday objects (I often hear NPR in your studio). Do politics inform your work? Is it melancholy at all, or nostalgic? Thinking how Felix Gonzales-Torres describes his work as beauty that lures people in, and then the work sends other messages beyond surface beauty--more political implications. Your work reminds me of his in this way.**

NP: I definitely bring a lot of feelings to my work. I feel a lot of rage at the injustices in the world and have always been energized by my anger. As a young painter I would paint screaming self-portraits, using bold strokes of Alizarin Crimson, my hands covered with the blood red, moved by the work of Egon Schiele and the German Expressionists. There was a lot of angst in my work and the physicality of painting offered a release. As an activist I often feel overwhelmed by the pain and suffering in the world, making art gives me an outlet to express these feelings in the language of abstractions. It's interesting to think of the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres in relation to mine. I never felt a direct connection, his work seems more conceptual. But I find his work profound in its layers of meaning, it speaks to the frailty of the human body, to love, death, and time. I myself am a very nostalgic person, I remember tiny details from my childhood, colors, smells, conversations. I think this sense of nostalgia seeps into my work, especially in my use of materials such as old wallpaper, scavenged ephemera, and illustrated children's books.



The Buddy System, 2020, Oil Paint on Canvas, 42"x 28"



Volley, 2020, Mixed Media on Paper, 18" x 24"

**KYLIE HEIDENHEIMER (KH):**

**Nicole, I too see your work as celebratory. Might there also be a countering sadness/ other definable weight? For example, in the way exuberance in the work at times also sags and hangs? Physical gravity too often seems to have an arena. These things come across to me with both the two and more three-dimensional work. Perhaps the celebratory aspects have the role of some kind of transparent/ indexical veil to an underside? You do speak of things covering (perhaps to reveal?) in your artist statement. Or, might celebration intertwine with something else? With the idea that celebration alone only tells part of a story? Perhaps there is some kind of undertow? My ultimate question being, is there celebration plus something else?**

NP: Kylie, I do think there is a celebratory quality to my recent work and a feeling of exuberance and joy, as Elisabeth mentioned. Viewer's often respond to the colors of my work, saying they are so happy. Knowing that there are so many emotions that go into my work I am often surprised by this response and want the subtle layers of feeling to also be revealed. Is it wrong to make happy paintings? I think happiness gets a bad rap in the art world. I try to embrace beauty and joy in my work and in the world.

I agree with the idea that celebration alone only tells part of a story. In my experience, especially as a child, there was often a lingering sadness and feelings of disappointment infused in every happy occasion. I feel there are certain myths of childhood and family that permeate American culture and in my recent series of installations I am making a commentary on this. In work such as *The Birthday Myth* and *Cake Fight*, I am creating abstractions composed of birthday party favors, streamers, plastic tablecloths, party horns, and balloons, all cheap materials I have found or purchased at the local 99cent stores on the Lower Eastside. Perfect ingredients for a party. These works are oozing and exploding with different textures, the fabrics and plastic are crumpled, they sag and hang, the colors shimmer and shine. I am using these materials like paint to create abstract compositions.

**KH: Volley, the work on paper piece I've chosen, seems to do something different than the painting Fenced In, The Buddy System, and The Wrangler. Is it perhaps a bit more anthropomorphized than your work generally? The circle with a darker inner one evokes to me a face. Also, the directionality or space on the right side focuses outside the piece. There is also a downward exit point in Fenced In, but it focuses us less 'out there'. Can you share the thinking between these three pieces in this regard?**

NP: I am really excited about my most recent series of mixed media collages; I feel that the 3-D elements are integrated well into work and the shapes are direct and bold. If the composition in *Volley* evokes a face or a recognizable image it is unintentional. My work is purely abstract. I am engaged in the language of abstraction and I try to transform the materials so they are unrecognizable. I do hope that the compositions and materials evoke memories and stir up subtle feelings when a viewer looks at the work.



**KH: Finally, your paintings remind me of Jackie Meier's in that aspects of both your work can be seen as unapologetically modern. If this connects for you, was this or something akin done with the intention of seeing the not-too-distant past afresh (and in this way injecting a freshness into the contemporary painting landscape?) My observation here certainly dovetails with Elisabeth's discussion.**

NP: Kylie I do hope that I am injecting a freshness into the contemporary landscape as you say, and I can see the connection to Jackie's work, particularly in our color choices.

**KH: Discussing what might possess retro elements makes we wonder if cultural eras have identifying colors. Were muted shades in combination with muted hues post-war devices for placating? For seeding societal order? These hue/ shades are, we probably all agree, inherent to 1950s Madison Avenue and post-war advertising. (a la Mad Men). This relatedly brings me to also ask: might parts of your work be addressing lingering expectations of women? Is an upbeat (celebratory) face we to this day, might still be expected to keep? Hovering expectations that if not vigilant, might in some current manifestation re-take a tight hold?**

NP: Kylie I love this discussion and your interpretation of my work. It is very intriguing and interesting to think about cultural eras having identifying colors. There are many subtle and subliminal uses of color in advertising and in public works. Are governments trying to placate us with muted shades and hues? It would be fascinating to delve into these ideas deeper. I absolutely identify as a feminist and my feelings about sexism and gender inequality, femininity and masculinity, definitely come into my work.

**KH: Finally, I am beginning to wonder, if there is an ultimate impetus to redefine the past via the muted hues and shades?**

NP: I haven't consciously tried to redefine the past in my work. I think the muted shades are simply my preferred aesthetic, what I am drawn to and are also the influence of the old children's books from the 50's and 60's. Over the years bright fluorescents and primary colors have come into the work too. My work is very process oriented, spontaneous and emotional. I make marks and respond to them with other marks. It feels very musical at times, colors and lines and shapes coming together to create rhythms, like improv jazz or classical symphonies.

