

# Jackie Lipton's LAVISH INTERIORS

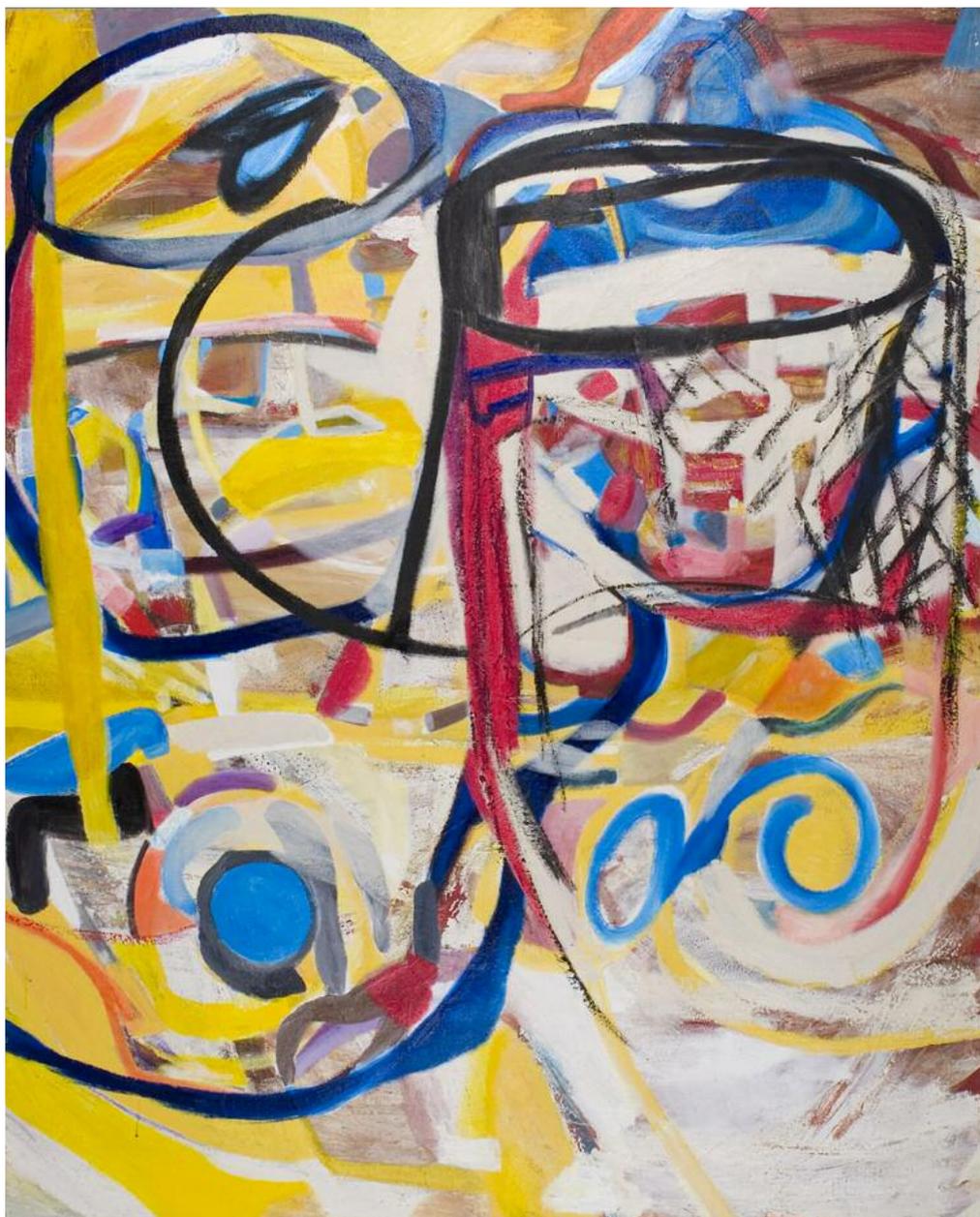
By Eileen Myles

IT'S HARD to believe that the Whitney once had a program for street kids from 1968 to 1975. Officially it was named the Art Resources Center and unofficially it was Cherry Street, named after the street it was on. It's torn down now. One of those buildings bought from the city for a buck but, like others designated for public use, when the thing that spawned them went away another deal took hold. I mention this when I look at and think about the paintings of Jackie Lipton—lavish interiors—because she was one of those kids herself: a self-described child of “poets and painters.” The plural's significant here, intentionally vague from a time when those genres were. Or the society itself got privileged over the genre. Jackie remained at Cherry Street for as long as the program did. She was a “peer studio artist” working with the other kids. Most of whom she now believes are dead. She had her first show at the Whitney Museum in 1974, when Laurie Anderson, then a recent product of the Whitney Program, was briefly directing the street kid program.

Jackie's fifty-nine, and once I had seen her work and thought and then wrote something I asked what she had in mind. “Something that wakes you up,” she said. “That shakes you. I mean something might *seem* central to a painting but the greater fact of my work is always simultaneity.” She's right. It's also “anticipatory.” I'm thinking of artists working in any medium when technology hadn't already crowded out the majority of ways of looking at the world. Yet the artist herself is managing to presage the world to come in a funky almost science club way. Like the technology may or may not yet exist but she's got the idea. She's stating the need. While constructing it on another plane. I'm thinking of Smithson's site non-site work or abstract painting as told by Jackie Lipton. The entire history of it. Somehow it feels like Web work. Without leaving the body behind.

On Wednesday I scooted to Brooklyn on the F to see her show. It's at Corinne Robbins on Atlantic Ave. Thirty-one paintings, mostly of medium dimensions—(16 X 20)—modest-sized I thought, though about a quarter of the paintings in the show are “body-sized”—(64 X 52)—and a couple even larger than that, then a slew of prints, mostly monochromatic—one a chain of moody diamonds in pale blue, and one of those diamonds is rouged up slightly, casting its red light on the rest. And another bunch . . . a wide color wash of ecstasy, a rave X.

But her paintings are the thing and they have enormous depth without being faintly morose. Jackie makes abstract paintings of all kinds—some seem kind of ab ex, but with circles; there's some early modern, and even some Impressionism. Yet the show, a collection of six years' work, coheres.



WHIRLAWAY, 2009, OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS, 70 BY 56 INCHES

It feels like a vivid sampler, tiny visitations, abutting moves, from the entire history of abstract painting, a bunch of clicks.

I think of this show as mainly yellow (though it's many-colored) but yellow is certainly the predominant experience of the show. Advertising has proved that yellow is the color people love the most. Is it just the sun? A buoyant public energy informs her paintings though it comes from the inside out. One I'm looking at is from her *Breath to Breath* series. I really hate her titles. They're sort of touchy-feely and the work isn't. From the bottom of the price list I learn most titles are “courtesy of Patti Smith with her permission.” Oh well. Nobody ever claimed Patti is a vanguard poet. The painting I'm standing in front of is finger-painting-y. Tactile. Thick bars of painted light tug down the frame like an obstruction you're viewing a film through: a weighty scrim. Others pull across. The energy is bracing and vivid. The honest and scrappy action on the surface of the canvas implies an interior to the painting while not giving us much information about it. Other than that it feels pretty good in there. It feels like a stu-

dio where even more painting's taking place. You feel like you're being given a piece of the map, just a crop. Jackie's privy to the entire vision though she's painting just *this*.

*Ghost Dance*, which I found downstairs (take a left at a couple of fried eggs at the foot of the stairs—yeah it's a couple of fried eggs and furniture. Just a curl.) possessed a vaguer and more interesting squalor than Bonnard. I mean thinking of those rooms of his where a door is open and a woman is coming in but you hardly see her. Jackie gives you less. There is no woman in the room. There is maybe a spoon. A scoop shape. And again the feeling, a dull tingle. And its roundness fans out. You get it all in a bad video way, I mean the space, the lighting one is not *supposed* to like but helplessly we dwell in. This is not all presence but all depth—regaling in its own perceptual moment—when you're standing there in your greasy hands with a day's schedule. *These* are the art. Is it feminist work when there's no woman. When it's all schedule. An index of color and a map of time. You're her and everything there is. The work simply slows down, changes you. That seems immense.

Jackie's mentor was Paul Brach, the New York painter who died in 2007 but in his midlife headed west to ride horses and to design the pedagogical approach that informed Cal Arts, not a big painting school at all. He came back to New York. Jackie gleaned so much from Brach—both teaching and painting. She's spent her adult life teaching art to autistic kids for the Board of Ed and now works in the childhood and adolescent Psych ward at Bellevue. The city keeps defunding, deciding who doesn't need art anymore, but she manages to alight on the next right occasion. The painting I turned toward when I entered the show—a pouring abstract grey, a painting I felt I already knew, even owned; but no, this time there's a thing in it. Which for me is her great revelation. A car or a train, a box—something installed within the force of her painting. To have that external something in the painting, a sealed thing that says stop but means go.

The Arthur Dove-looking paintings in what I'd call the middle of her show were paintings full of bright round things, areas outlined—my science geek would call them vacuoles—yet I imagine them painted one by one. The assortment drawn quickly and then colored in. I'm not a painter. Piles of fruit, people, things, a landscapey cumulative effect, abundance. Seeing is accomplished

by using these portals of activity, this rudimentary lens, her circle, a web of concurrent choices. Her early moderns have a bright palette that lauds the juiciness of the endeavor of working and living. These are American paintings. In a very William Dean Howells kind of way. I get giddy thinking about how much they are *not* paintings of agony—while also being not *unaware* of suffering. Almost communal choices make these paintings cohere. Their openness, their transparency of structure. Their frankness about how the very obstructions to our intended path—the building's pulled down, the train's stuck, somebody died—that next thing, something abstract, whatever happens, is what keeps us in life. Horrifyingly true. And that's her strength here. Her view is trusty. This very young show by an older person. I love the fact of Jackie Lipton. The continuing newness of her game.

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