

## INTERVIEW WITH LA-BASED MEMPHIS-BORN ARTIST LAURIE NYE

By Marcelle Joseph • 15 October 2016  
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Artist Laurie Nye's other-worldly paintings filled with omnipotent female cyborgs and organic geometric shapes feature at the current group show at The Dot Project in London entitled "Figure It Out" (until 13th November). On the occasion of her European debut, Marcelle Joseph sat down to talk to this LA-based Memphis-born artist about her painting practice and inspirations.

Marcelle Joseph: Your paintings offer a vision of an alternate reality or a fantasy world ruled by women and for women. Could you talk about your subject matter? Is it utopian or feminist in focus?

Laurie Nye: I'd say my paintings are conjured from a feminine gaze and lean toward a visionary type of pictorial space. I do like to reimagine myths, turning them on their ear and offering a different perspective, flipping roles of hero vs heroine. I feel compelled to look beyond the reality I live in as a woman and a creator in a patriarchal world where I see a history strewn with cruelty, greed and

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environmental exploitation. I collaborate in an alternative reality with invented muses, which are powerful, intelligent, empathetic and hybrid female energies. That sounds either utopian or escapist, when you think about it.

MJ: Are there narrative threads weaving through your paintings in general? I see for your 2015 LA solo show you transformed the myth of Andromeda, recasting it to empower female characters. Does this theme continue through the works presented at The Dot Project in London?

LN: I was raised in the deep south in the U.S. and southerners do like narratives. I love allegorical painting so I tend to be drawn to ideas and themes. The theme of Andromeda continues to inform my latest work as I consider ways to depict a fantastic realm empowered and shaped by female hybrid beings. I see my work as an ongoing collaboration with these nature-loving muses. The idea of the cyborgian figure and the intermixing of geometric versus organic form continues to evolve in strange and surprising ways in my recent paintings.

MJ: You paint exclusively female figures. Do you consider yourself a feminist or do you just prefer the female form for formal reasons?

LN: My art practice is defined by a strong educational foundation in figurative drawing and painting. I love being a woman, painting women who rule in a reality I'd want to exist within. So far, the main subjects in my paintings have been female, not necessarily to the exclusion of other sexes. If envisioning a galaxy run by women is considered a feminist ideal then I'm a card carrying member.

MJ: Do you use source material or do these female figures come from your imagination?

LN: I enjoy looking at weird sci-fi illustration and I hoard art books and random ephemera. Over time, much of what I've collected and researched in the past has been internalised. I draw a lot straight out of my imagination. I'm very in tune with the internal world and I do a lot of paintings from simple pencil drawings of ideas that come to me.

MJ: Let's talk composition. Your picture plane is dense and crowded with imagery filling up every inch of the canvas. This convention lends an immersive quality to the work for the viewer. What are your intentions as the maker?

LN: As for composition, I want to suck you in beyond the lateral plane of looking at a surface. It's not enough for me to move your eyes around; I'm interested in a transformative space for the viewer to wonder about over time. The paintings have indeed become more shallow in depth which offers a more intimate space to the viewer and to my mind creates a more complex, figure/ground relationship.

MJ: How do you approach your colour palette as the colours are vibrant and saturated? Do you believe that colour can provoke certain feelings in the viewer?

LN: I'm very much interested in the emotive experience of colour. I think about colour a lot and my colour mood shifts. My last series was, to me, like my neon impressionist phase. Now I've returned to black as a marker of emphasis. I love the use of black in Manet's paintings. I get excited and go through colour stories. I want to go dimmer, deeper, but I keep conjuring these exuberant, velvety, sort of weird palettes. Lots of yellow, pink, blue, red and black. I have ways of layering the colours to make them sing. It's a balance and sometimes it really hits the right note. When you figure out how to make colours react to each other, a painting will draw out a visceral feeling.

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MJ: With your use of motif and pattern, your work is reminiscent of the great Swedish abstract mystic painter Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). At some point, do your figures become abstracted motifs/shapes/forms as well?

LN: \*Wow, thank you for the compliment, I have the highest regard for Hilma af Klint's transcendent paintings. Her work is out of place, out of time and I definitely identify with that. She painted in a vacuum and in a way it seems like a gift to me, to have that autonomy and singularity of space in which to carve out a vision. To answer your question, the figures in my paintings are invented around the idea of hybridity, a changing body which can shift and morph. In my paintings, the figures/creatures/colours/forms are all able to meld and become indistinct from each other and their environment if they so choose.

MJ: You attended the world famous Cal Arts, completing your MFA in 2002. How has your educational background played out into your current practice, if at all?

LN: Cal Arts is becoming a more distant, yet idyllic memory. That place was a hotbed for boundless creative and intellectual experimentation. I was so fortunate to work with many wonderful brains, including the revered conceptual artist and thinker, Michael Asher. He was not an aesthetically minded artist, completely anti-visual and I learned a lot from those rigorous, all-day critiques. I was naive and I benefited from sheer dumb guts to speak up for myself. Many professors back then were anti-painting. That was how I began my passage of grad-school, "why painting?". Sheesh! I made it out of there feeling I'd achieved an exclusive badge of honor alongside my fellow MFA comrades. We fondly call each other "Martians". It changed me forever, giving me a broadened dialog outside of my painting practice.