

# create!

MAGAZINE

## Interview: Rebecca Rutstein

December 15, 2016 • Blog, Interview



PHOTO BY HALIEN MASON PHOTOGRAPHY

## REBECCA RUTSTEIN

[WWW.REBECCARUTSTEIN.COM](http://WWW.REBECCARUTSTEIN.COM)

A Philadelphia-based artist whose work spans painting, installation, and sculpture, Rebecca Rutstein explores geometric abstraction with a vision inspired by science and scientific data. Rutstein has been an Artist-in-Residence in geologically dynamic locations including Iceland, Hawaii, the Canadian Rockies and Vermont. Most recently, she completed two "Artist at Sea" Residencies aboard science research ships where she collaborated with scientists mapping out never-before-seen seafloor topography from the Galápagos Islands to California and exploring uncharted territory from Vietnam to Guam.

IMAGES COURTESY OF REBECCA RUTSTEIN

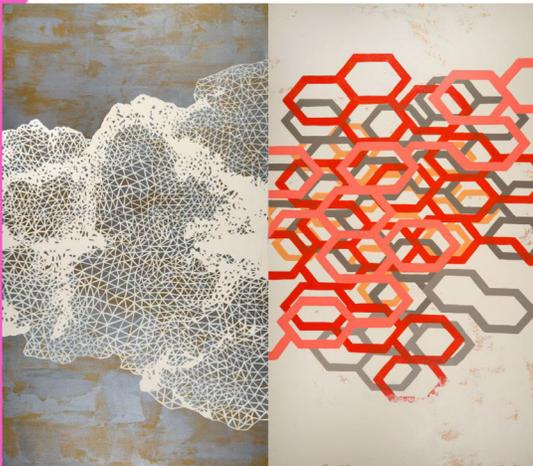


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Rutstein has exhibited widely in galleries, museums, and institutions, and has received numerous awards including a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, Pew Professional Development Grant, Ocean Exploration Trust Fellowship, Independence Foundation Fellowship and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grants. She has garnered recent attention through radio interviews on NPR and Hawaii Public Radio, and with features in Vice Magazine, Huffington Post, Philadelphia Magazine, Philadelphia Inquirer, Artblog, Fresh Paint Magazine and New American Paintings. Her work can be found in public collections including Johns Hopkins Hospital, Nordstrom, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and Temple University where recently completed her first permanent, outdoor public art commission.

Rebecca Rutstein holds a BFA (Magna Cum Laude) from Cornell University (with abroad study in Rome, Italy) and an MFA from University of Pennsylvania. She has been a visiting artist at Universities across the country and conducted ship-to-shore outreach with museums world-wide. Rutstein is represented by Bridgette Mayer Gallery in Philadelphia and Zane Bennett Contemporary/Form & Concept in Santa Fe, New Mexico.





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BLOG, INTERVIEW

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*When did you decide to become an artist? Briefly tell us about what inspired you to make the decision.*

Drawing is one of my earliest memories, something I loved to do from a very young age. I drew voraciously, and it helped me get through some challenging times. As I grew up, I dreamed of being an artist but did not imagine that I could practically pursue it as a profession. I remember vividly the moment that all changed: I was seventeen, filling out my college applications when I had a conversation with my dad, who had just left the comfort of his 25-year law career to pursue a dream managing a minor-league baseball team. He encouraged me to think outside the box, do what I loved, and follow my passions. I have never looked back.

*This was your second year participating in a sea expedition residency. How did you get involved with this project?*

Science and technology, specifically geology and maps, have been the subject matter in my work for many years. I have been fortunate to complete art residencies in some pretty inspiring places around the world to create site-specific projects. When I was invited to sail on a research vessel where the ship's multibeam sonar system would map never-before-seen ocean floor terrain in the Galapagos Islands, it was a chance I couldn't pass up. For me, to see part of our planet revealed for the very first time, and to bring these revelations into my work, was the opportunity of a lifetime.



*What were some highlights of making art on a research vessel?*

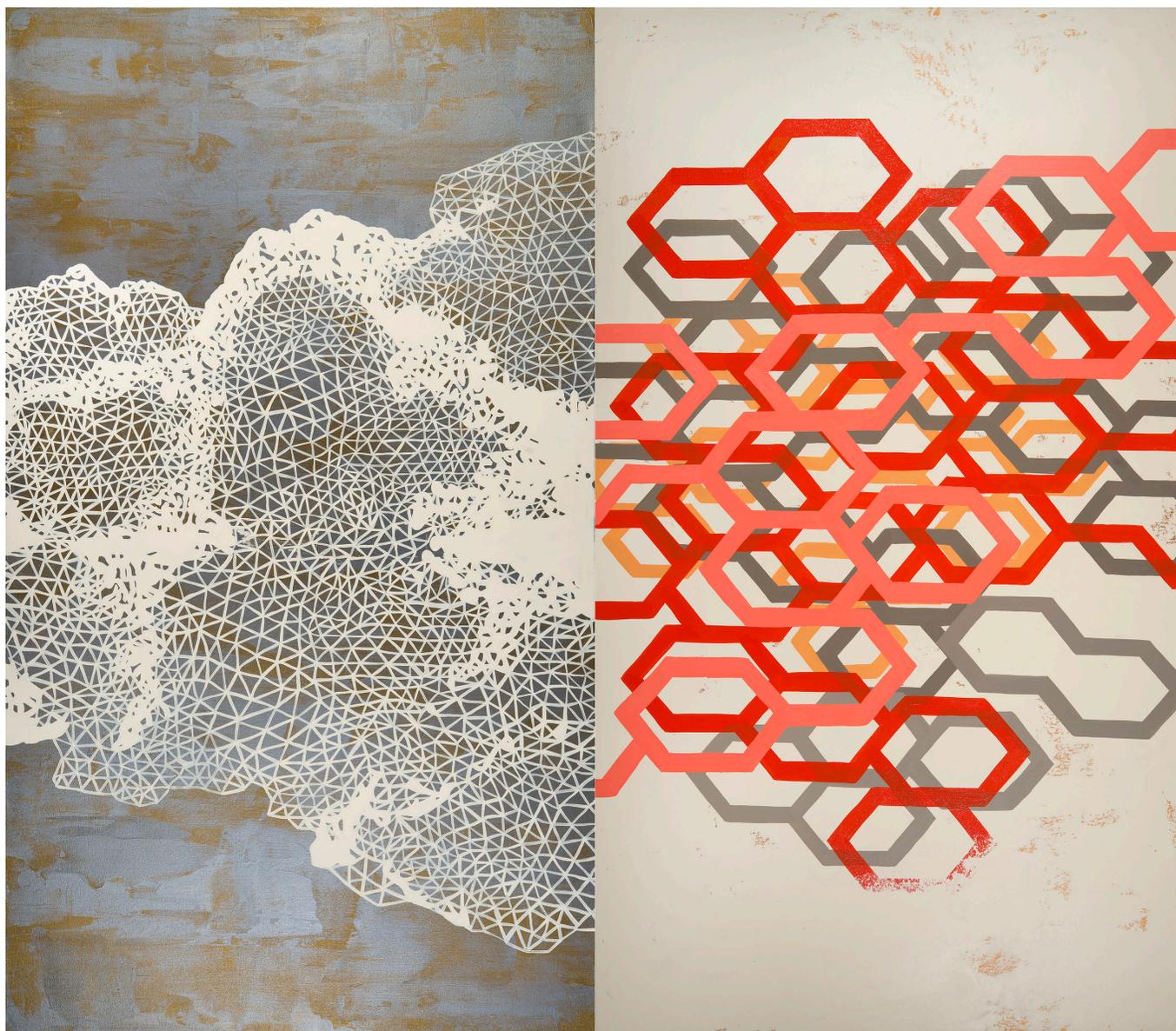
Collaborating with the scientists and crew, creating a studio in the wet lab, embracing the rocking motion of the ship into my artistic process, finding my place within the established rhythms of ship life, making friends from around the globe, and feeling the freedom of the open sea and sky, all culminated into an unforgettable experience.

*What was your early work like? Were your paintings and sculptures always influenced by science?*

My early work coming out of grad school was inspired by abstract expressionism and was very process oriented. The paintings were highly emotive and a response to some intense personal experiences. But the paintings lacked structure and needed to be anchored. At some point, I found myself leafing through an almost forgotten geology textbook from college and came across plate tectonic diagrams showing the shifting of earth's plates. It spoke to me as a metaphor for the upheaval, collision, and separation I was feeling in my own life. That was the beginning of my fascination with science as a subject matter in my work.

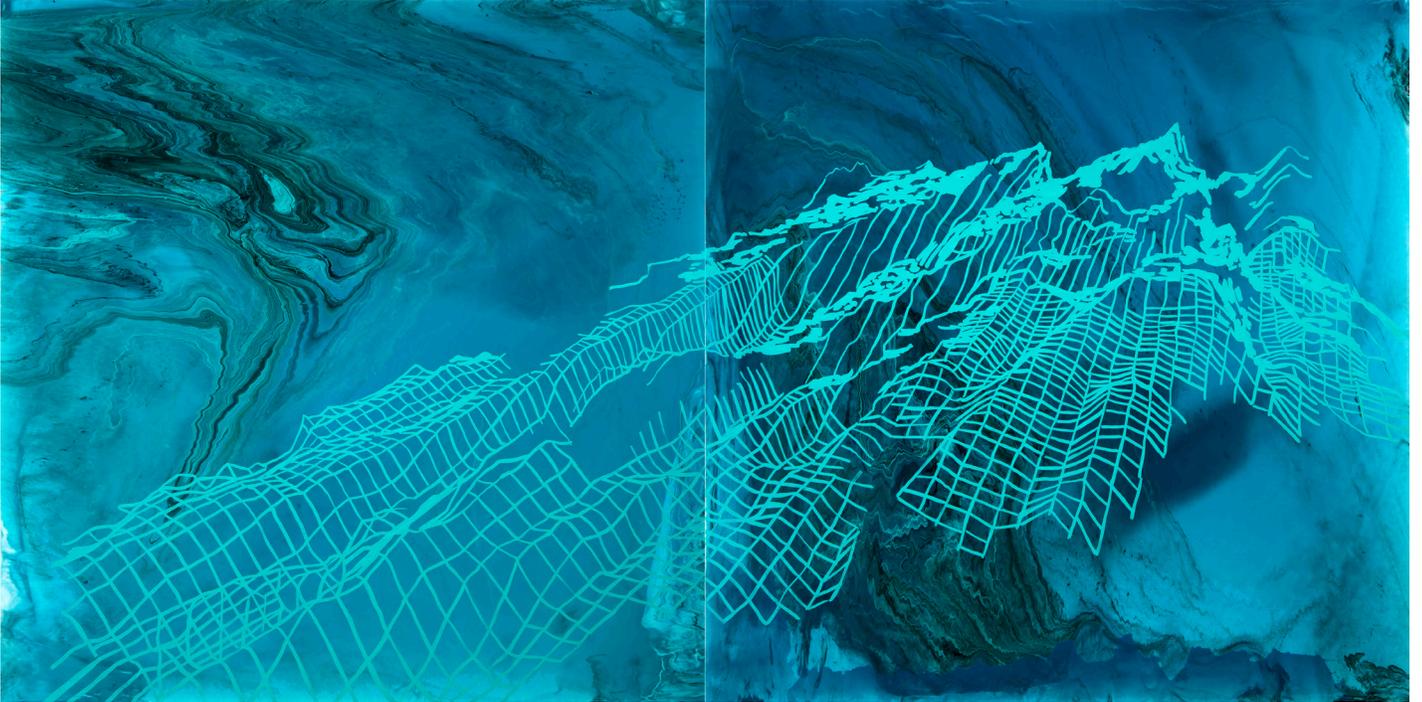
*Briefly, explain your process. How does each piece come to life? Do you do extensive planning for each work?*

I generally work on paintings or sculptures in series with an overall theme in mind. I often have a color scheme and thoughts about the scale of my marks as a starting point, but from there it is totally process oriented. It is not unusual for me to paint out a painting several times before I arrive at something I can live with. I never sketch before making a painting - the canvas is my drawing board.



*What's next for you? What events and projects should we be on the lookout for?*

I recently got signed by a gallery in Santa Fe, NM and am working on a new body of work for a solo show opening there in the summer of 2017. I also have some pending large-scale commissions including a public mural project in Philadelphia along with some sculptural projects overseas. And I am hoping to get back out to sea if time allows!



*All images courtesy of the artist and Bridgette Mayer Gallery, Philadelphia, PA.*