


BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



Jessica Backhaus

“It’s okay to show all your colors”

Luis Guzman

Jessica Backhaus – Blue Note, 2015

Art Talk Magazine: Before asking you what inspired you to enter the challenging, yet inspiring world of photography, we would like to know what you would have chosen to do, if you had not chosen photography?

Jessica Backhaus: “If I hadn’t become a photographer, I believe I would have still found my path within the art world – most likely as a curator. I’m deeply drawn to the process of bringing together diverse artistic voices under a shared thematic vision. There’s something incredibly compelling about witnessing how artists from different disciplines interpret and respond to a common idea. Curating allows for a dialogue between works, and I find great inspiration in creating those conversations – seeing how they resonate with each other and with the audience. I have always been surrounded by art, which has deeply shaped who I am today. From an early age, I developed a fascination with the creative process. I often found myself in museums, exploring and absorbing the diverse range of art forms on display. It wasn’t just about viewing art – it was about understanding the narratives behind each piece, the emotions they conveyed, and the techniques that brought them to life. When I began my career, my focus initially gravitated toward photography. I was drawn to photographers from various genres like portraiture, still life or documentary. Photography seemed to offer an immediate, tangible connection to the world, one that resonated with my own desire to express and communicate visually.

As my artistic journey evolved, I naturally shifted towards abstraction. This transition felt organic, and I began to explore painting and sculpture more deeply. I found myself increasingly captivated by the interplay of form, color, and texture – elements that speak to the deeper, often unspoken aspects of our human experience. I discovered new ways to express emotion, thought, and perception through abstract works. Each phase of my creative path has been in some sort of way a response to the influences around me – whether it was the vibrant world of theatre, the stark beauty of photography, or the expansive freedom of abstraction. My personal journey is a continuous exploration, driven by an insatiable curiosity and a deep connection to the arts in all their forms.”

ATM: “In her search for new means of expression, Jessica Backhaus varies her work between documentation and abstraction. The artist deals with objects and situations of everyday life and views the world through her camera again and again from unusual perspectives. Staged still lifes, collages and minimalistic color and light experiments have recently emerged from her free play with materials.” Can you share with us when your fascination to express everyday life through unusual perspectives started?

JB: “That fascination began quite early, some 25 years ago when I started my career. I’ve al-

ways been drawn to the quiet poetry in ordinary moments – the way light falls on a mundane object, or how a fleeting gesture can carry so much meaning. Over time, I realized that by shifting the perspective – whether visually, conceptually, or emotionally – I could uncover layers of beauty and tension that might otherwise go unnoticed. It became a way for me to reframe the familiar, to challenge perception, and to invite others to see the world with fresh eyes. That curiosity still drives my work today.

Still lifes, in particular, have become a central part of this exploration. I believe they tell their own quiet, evocative stories. Through the careful arrangement of objects – what is present, what is absent – I try to capture something essential about the human experience. There’s a subtle tension in stillness, a kind of emotional residue that lingers in inanimate things. For me, still lifes become a way to speak about presence, memory, and the traces we leave behind, all without needing a human figure in the frame.”

ATM: Color helps to express light – not the physical phenomenon, but the only light that really exists, that in the artist’s brain.” Henri Matisse “Farbe ist meine Obsession” was one of the title of one of the multiple articles about you. (IDEAT – “Farbe ist meine Obsession” – Camilla Péus, No.5, January/February 2022). You have been regarded as an “Alchimiste de la Couleur”, an alchemist of colour. If you close your eyes and let your imagination run wild, what colour would you choose? What is colour for you? Is it really an obsession? Which colour is your favourite?

JB: “I would choose my favorite color, the Blue from Yves Klein. His particular shade of blue – his iconic International Klein Blue – moves me in a way that is difficult to fully articulate, but deeply felt. There’s something about its intensity and depth that transcends the visual. It’s not just a color; it’s an experience. What touches me most is how Klein used this blue to evoke the immaterial, the spiritual, the boundless. It has a physical presence that feels weightless, almost like it’s vibrating with energy. In our living room I have painted one wall with that ultramarine hue. The French company Ressources has worked together with the Estate of Yves Klein to produce this color. Every day when I encounter that blue, it stirs something elemental in me – like a direct line to emotion, memory, and even silence. It reminds me that color alone can carry meaning, can communicate something profound without the need for form or narrative. That is incredibly inspiring to me as a visual artist.”

ATM: You have exhibited all around the world. Can you share with us one moment that epitomizes your artistic career? Is it a person, a place, an artwork? Your “Plein soleil” series?

JB: “It’s difficult to distill an entire artistic journey into a single moment, but if I had to choose one that encapsulates something essential about

my artistic path, it would be the creation of my two recent series *Plein Soleil* and *Cut Outs*. These bodies of work marked a turning point – not only in terms of recognition, but in how I understood my own evolution as an artist.

Plein Soleil and *Cut Outs* emerged from a deep, almost instinctive need to explore the world of abstraction. Abstraction has captivated me for the past eight years, and with every year that passes, my fascination only deepens. There’s something profoundly liberating and mysterious about abstraction – it allows us to step beyond the limits of representation and into a realm where imagination is unbound. For me it creates a space to dream, to feel, and to explore my own unique perceptions of the world. And in abstraction, each viewer is invited to have their own interpretations and emotional responses. This makes the experience deeply personal and infinitely varied.

When these series were first shown, I was struck by how people responded to it – how they felt something personal reflected in those carefully composed, seemingly quiet scenes. That shared emotional resonance, between artist and viewer, felt like a confirmation that photography could do exactly what I hoped: capture something both intimate and universal.”

ATM: on started very young ... I believe you were only 16! What advice do you wish you had been given when you started out? What advice would you give to an aspiring young photographic artist?

JB: “If there is a lesson to be learned in the creative process, it’s that finding your own authentic artistic voice is crucial – and that journey is rarely a straight line. Developing a unique voice takes time, self-exploration, and experimentation. It requires patience, because, like any meaningful pursuit, it involves growth through trial and error. You might not find your approach or your true expression right away. In fact, the winding path of discovery can often lead to unexpected and profound breakthroughs.

The key is not to be afraid of failure. Failure, while uncomfortable, is an essential part of creating. It’s through our mistakes, missteps, and moments of doubt that we learn what doesn’t work and, in turn, what does. Every failure is an opportunity to refine, to reassess, and to move forward with new insights. Sometimes, it’s in the experiments and the risks we take that we uncover something completely new and exciting. The important thing is to not let failure define you, but to let it fuel your perseverance.

In the end, creativity is a process – and like the French painter Matisse said: “La créativité demande du courage.” “Creativity demands courage.”

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ATM: How has the art world changed since you started your career?

JB: "The art world has changed in profound and complex ways since I first started my career. When I began, there was a certain slowness to the process - more time for reflection, for building relationships with curators and galleries, and for developing a body of work over years rather than seasons. Today, the pace feels much faster, shaped by the immediacy of social media and the demand for constant visibility. While this has opened up access and allowed for more diverse voices to be seen and heard - which is a very positive shift - it has also created a sense of pressure to produce and to be continually present in the digital sphere.

I also feel that another major change is how the boundaries between disciplines have become more fluid. Photography, for example, is no longer confined to its traditional definitions; it now intersects more freely with performance, installation, moving image, and other media. I find this evolution exciting, as it invites new forms of expression and collaboration.

Ultimately, while the landscape has shifted, what hasn't changed is the need for authenticity - for artists to remain rooted in their vision and to continue creating work that resonates on a human level."

ATM: Can you share your current and next projects?

JB: Plein Soleil is my current project and is an homage to the sun and to color. In my artistic practice, the interplay of color and light stands as foundational elements, serving not merely as aesthetic choices but as the very language through which I communicate. Color, in its purest form, holds a narrative - each hue is alive with emotion and significance. And light, in its shifting qualities, transforms both the surface and the space, creating depth, contrast, and movement.

My creative process is very intuitive and often guided by the materials themselves. This project emerged completely unexpected. One day, when the sun was shining brightly, I laid out my paper collection on a table where the sunlight poured in directly. I was struck by the way each paper had its own unique texture. I began to bend and fold specific colored sheets in various sizes, carefully selecting which ones to bring into a dialogue with one another.

As the sunlight hit the papers, the interplay of light and shadow created rich, deep contrasts. The way the shadows stretched and shifted intrigued me. I took my camera and began capturing these fleeting moments, documenting the ephemeral beauty of the paper combinations and their changing shadows. It's always a bit of a performance - each photograph is a record of something that won't last. I am shifting and turning the papers in subtle gestures, so each composition is a moment in time.

For me each project feels like a step further into

a landscape where forms are less about the familiar and more about the essence of feeling, light, and space. It's an evolution, a way of pushing abstraction further and exploring how the simplest elements can evoke the most profound emotional responses. This ongoing exploration is not only a way of understanding the world around me but also a way of connecting to my own evolving artistic voice.

ATM: What are three adjectives that best describe you?

JB: "curious, joyful, open-minded."

ATM: And now our favourite question: What would be your "dream" exhibition? If you had a magic wand, where would it be, what would you show, and what artists would be side by side with your creations? What would be the theme(s)?

JB: "My dream exhibition would be one that creates a deeply immersive, poetic almost meditative experience - where viewers don't just look at the work, but feel it. I imagine a space that is minimal, and carefully choreographed with light and some colored walls, where each image or installation has room to breathe. The exhibition would explore themes of abstraction, presence, memory, and the passage of time.

I would love to curate it in an unconventional setting - maybe an abandoned house, a former greenhouse, or a modernist villa flooded with natural light. A place where the architecture also becomes a part of the narrative. Sound, or even scent, might play a role - very subtly - to awaken different senses and create an emotional undercurrent.

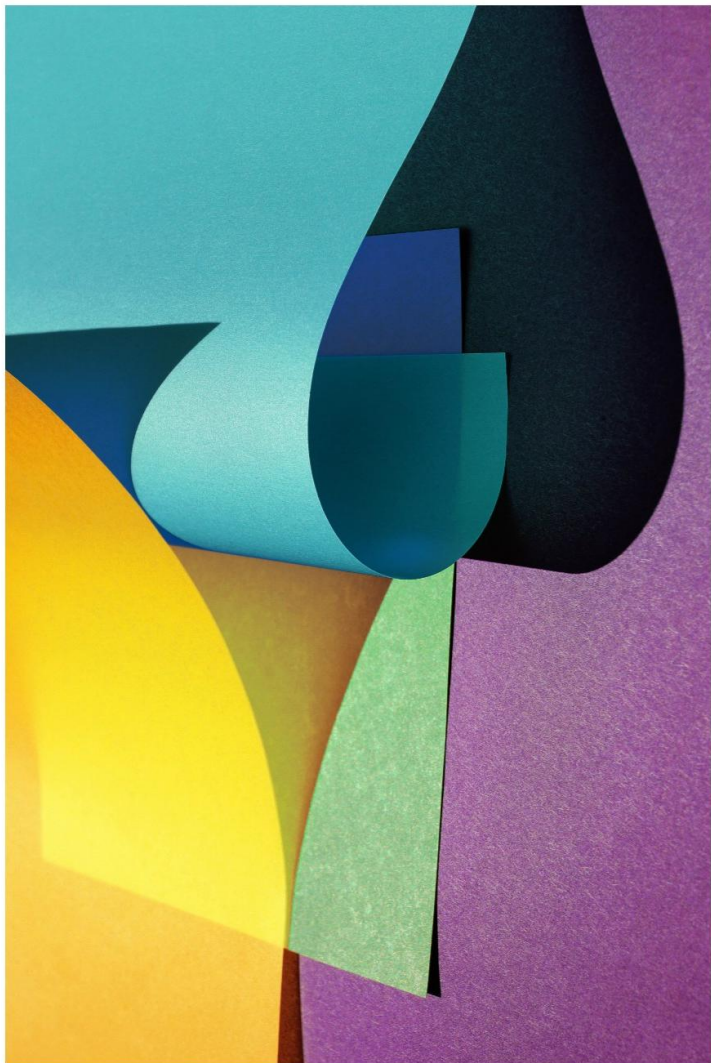
It would be great to bring in some other artists whose work speaks in quiet dialogue with mine - painters, sculptors, or filmmakers - so that the exhibition feels more like a shared, open conversation. For me, the ultimate goal would be for people to leave the space carrying a kind of stillness with them - something unspoken, but deeply felt."



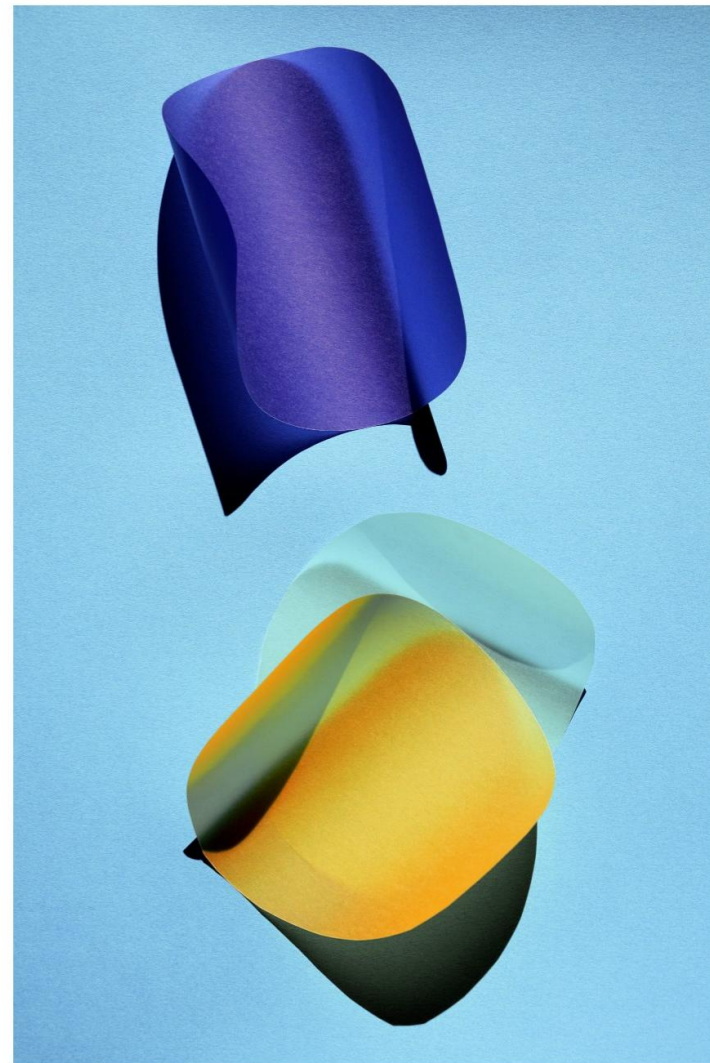
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Jessica Backhaus - untitled22, 2023



Jessica Backhaus - cutout, 2020

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