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ABOUT

ARTISTS

MFA VISITS

BERLIN ARTIST CALL

PROGRAMS



ARDEN BENDLER BROWNING

PHILADELPHIA, PA | BY RACHEL SITKIN

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Philadelphia based painter Arden Bendler Browning invited me to her studio a few weeks ago to take a look at what she's been working on this year. Arden and I first met in 2011 at the [Arlington Art Center](#) where we both exhibited work as part of that year's Fall Solos Exhibition. I had seen her work in print before that exhibition, but was captivated by the dynamic mural-size painting on tyvek that she created for that show. This summer she began posting snippets on social media of her recent experiments with virtual reality (VR) painting, and I was inspired to reach out to her to learn more about this evolution in her work.

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Arden's current studio, housed in the historic Crane Building in N. E. Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, is light filled and crowded with canvasses in her signature dynamic abstracted-landscape style. Her most recent compositions were made in response to a 3-months-long family road trip across Australia. Her family travelled around the country in an RV over the winter of 2018. Lucky for Arden, her husband Matt enjoys driving, leaving her free to sit in the passenger seat with her sketch book or watercolors on her lap, or snapping photographs as the landscape speeds by outside.

This mode of working, direct response to the landscape as seen through the car windshield, has been Arden's main means of collecting source material for her large format studio paintings for several years. A previous series was created after a road trip to the Northern Plains and Rockies in the US and Canada.

While the finished studio paintings are less faithful to the identifying colors and textures of Australia than the drawings and small paintings on paper made during the trip, the speed at which she moves through the landscape is evident in all of her work. The acrylic, flash paint, and ink leaps, stretches, and races across each canvass. She uses nap rollers,

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squeegees, poured paint, and brushes to build her paintings in bold rich colors; the vanishing point where the road meets the horizon a consistent reference to the landscape as inspiration.

Among the new works are a series of 48" circular canvases. Arden told me that she has been experimenting with the circular format as a way to signify the passage of time. These paintings feel more abstract and more layered, as though a multitude of transparent snapshots have been stacked atop one another. In many the colors are darker, the reference to a specific place less evident, and the movement within each circular frame more tumultuous than in the rectangular works. The round edges sweep each mark back into play again and again.



This feeling of play – of marks dancing in an abstract space – may be influenced by Arden's recent experiments with VR painting. Though she was initially resistant to incorporating technology into her work, Matt convinced her

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to experiment with Google Tilt Brush after he'd become familiar with the program through his own work as an interactive content designer.

While in her studio Arden demonstrated the software for me. Wearing her VR headset, controllers in hand, she swept her arms out and around her body, up over head, turning left and right to "sculpt" a painting into the 3D space. What results is like a spherical room-size digital installation version of her paintings.

So far, Arden has begun each new VR painting by placing an image of one of her "real" paintings or drawings or photographs into the virtual world to serve as an anchor and point of departure. This technology is still relatively new to her and there is a lot that she has yet to discover about how the tools work, but she is clearly very excited by the potential, and by the possibility that this technology could help people access abstract painting by giving them an immediate sensory experience in 360 space. Take a look at the videos included here of her VR pieces *Bridge* and *Compass* to experience for yourself how Arden is utilizing this new technology. She has generously given us an opportunity to explore the inside of her creative process.

More about the artist:

[Arden Bandler Browning](#) holds a BFA in Art from Carnegie Mellon University (1997), a Master of Studio Art with high distinctions from Sydney College of the Arts (2000), and an MFA in Painting from Tyler School of Art (2003). Her work has been featured twice in New American Paintings, and a commissioned permanent work for the City of Philadelphia at the Philadelphia International Airport was recently installed in February 2017. She is represented by [Bridgette Mayer Gallery](#) in Philadelphia, PA; [Tinney Contemporary](#) in Nashville, TN; and [Galleri Urbane](#) in Dallas, TX.

An artist's book of photographs and paintings made during her road trip across Australia can be purchased here: <http://www.bridgettemayergallery.com/publications/arden-bandler-browning>

Upcoming Exhibitions:

[Aqua Art Miami](#) with Bridgette Mayer Gallery December 5-9, 2018

[Weatherspoon Art Museum](#), Art on Paper 2019, UNC Greensboro,

February 2- June 9, 2019

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