



JRB ART
AT THE ELMS
Paseo Arts District

JRB ARTIST TALK WITH LAURA NUGENT

Before Covid, we had scheduled both Laura Nugent and Beth Hammack for solo shows in May and June. Beth's show was installed, we had a virtual opening and her work will be on exhibit through May. Since Laura lives and works in Kansas City, we decided to postpone her show until August of 2021. But we want to share with you a conversation we recently had with Laura on line. Laura is a full time artist who has been living and working in the Kansas City area since 2004. After earning a BFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art, she traveled the country, exhibiting in juried art festivals and galleries. Laura has won awards for her painting, including Best Emerging Artist and Best of Show at the Paseo Arts Festival. Her work is included in collections around the US, including The Four Seasons and Grand Hyatt Hotels.



Laura Nugent



Joy Reed Belt

JRB: What first brought you and your work to Oklahoma City and The Paseo?

Laura: The first time I visited OKC was in 2008 to exhibit at the Paseo Arts Festival. I had been ramping up my "art fair career" since moving from Los Angeles to Kansas City in 2004. Paseo, at that time, was a word-of-mouth show. I was tipped off to it while in Tulsa, the year before, by a friend who did lots of shows in Oklahoma. I understood immediately why it was a closely guarded secret among its regular artists. I sold many paintings, survived the searing heat and received the award for "Best New Artist."

JRB: I've heard from several artists that the Paseo Arts Festival is a "word of mouth show." Why and how is that?

Laura: When I returned to Kansas City, I told two of my closest artist friends about it. They participated the next year and, like me, were impressed and rewarded by the diverse, art-loving audience and grassroots artist-run Paseo Arts Organization. Of course, our secret show didn't stay a secret for long. Artists I knew from Chicago, Atlanta and beyond were willing to travel to OKC to be exposed to its audience. With only 90 available spaces, the competition grew. In 2010, I won the award for "Best of Show." The next year, the jury did not let me in! After that, any time I was accepted into the show, I was grateful.

At the end of 2016, I was ready to hang up my sun hat and stop "touring" full time. The great painter Jim Keffer recommended I approach JRB Art while also putting in a good word for me. I was so pleased to start showing at the gallery in 2017, as I still wanted to have a presence in the Paseo Arts District, albeit an indoor one.



Laura Nugent, "Changing Bodies 1,"
Acrylic on Canvas, 72 x 36 in., \$4,200



Works on Paper in Progress



Laura Nugent, "Changing Bodies 3,"
Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 40 in., \$1,680

JRB: Do you miss being on the Festival Circuit and the friendships that are forged in that kind of episodic kind of adventure?

Laura: I don't miss the festivals, but I miss my traveling artist friends terribly. We spent many nights unwinding at the "Tower," as we called it (that's the Tower Hotel). The best room rates were always on Northwest Expressway. We'd hang at the pool, drinking wine out of paper coffee cups, trying to cool off. Breakfast was, of course, at Beverly's.

I love visiting Oklahoma City. My last trip was on a very cold December night, right before Christmas. I toured 21C with the museum manager (the best exhibition spaces of any of them nationally), quietly viewed Chihuly's Persian Ceiling at the OKCMoA and walked alone through the Memorial, late in the evening. My favorite structure is still the Gold Dome. What a great studio art center that would be.

JRB: Several artists have told me that being isolated during this period of social distancing has impacted their ability to create. Some have said that they don't feel motivated to create. How has this period of self-isolation affected you and your art?

Laura: Well the good news is that I am in my Kansas City studio, every day. I'm grateful that we decided to postpone the show so that I can be there with my work in person. When we are together again, you can be sure I will not be showing the body of work I had planned on. I'll bring only what I make going forward. These days, my studio is filling up with large, color-filled works. Bold and bright, their surfaces are textured by the layers of paint I apply until their hues are precisely as I want them. There is no way I could be around anything but optimistic, heroic color right now.

I have a second body of work developing, smaller paper cut-outs, painted and paired directly on the wall or even the floor. The pieces are still raw and imperfect, and can be viewed in progress on Instagram (@lauranugentpaintings). I don't know if they will be presented more formally or if they are a studio project. It might be an Instagram-only exhibition, a way for me to stay in touch with viewers and show some forward momentum.

JRB: Typically you create non-representative, painterly works that focus on color harmonies and geometrical design. Can you further explain your process to us?

Laura: My method of layering paint is to use both transparent washes and thick, dripping coats of paint to create depth and embrace the unpredictable qualities of the materials I use. While working on each piece, and I have sent you images of some examples, I assign the meaning of pattern and color to more narrative elements. They can become aerial-view landscapes, flags, tapestries or as tributes to ordinary objects.

JRB: As a painter, what is your goal in creating art?

Laura: To take small moments and make them spectacular.

JRB: Thank you Laura. We're looking forward to seeing your new work in 2021.

Visit our website



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