

A THOUSAND WORDS

Laura Owens TALKS ABOUT HER NEW WORK

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I feel that my paintings are very specifically American and have a lot to do with where I come from. I suppose it's a straightforward, Midwestern, no-bones-about-it sensibility and a certain sense of humor. I've always thought that, instead of making the day fit into your painting, you should make the painting fit into your day. A painting should fit into your life. I think that I picked up that idea from Mary Heilmann and her way of working. I met her when she was a visiting artist at Cal Arts, and she had a profound impact on me. Although she's extremely serious about what she's doing, she has a very casual approach to making a painting.

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Laura Owens makes wily, sensational paintings: Lines sweep into our peripheral vision, speed along as daringly as fearless schoolgirls sliding on ice, then burst unexpectedly into shapes—tiny spiraling volucranes of color, wavering horizons, or bulky clouds. If Owens's style—a surprising blend of mid-century formalism and Pop mischievousness—evinces a cagey knowingness, it also reveals an unabashed delight in the voluptuousness of paint and form. With their light touch and winking palette (Rainbow Brites, avocado, harvest gold)—not to mention Owens's open, nonpolemical disposition—her paintings owe more to the seemingly nonchalant inventiveness of Mary Heilmann than to the cool metastyles of Jonathan Lasker or David Reed. One of a number of LA artists (including Monique Prieto, Steven Hull, Ingrid Calame, and Heidi Kidon) currently being touted as the latest rebirth of contemporary painting, Owens came to the West Coast in the early '90s to earn her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts. Born in Euclid, Ohio, in 1970, Owens studied at the Rhode Island School of Design before moving west. We met in her Los Angeles studio, a pair of adjoining storefronts—bright, high-ceilinged spaces that give her work room to breathe—and discussed the enormous (nearly 10-by-40-foot) untitled painting she exhibited last year at Loyola University of Chicago.

—SUSAN MORGAN



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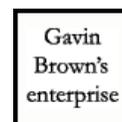
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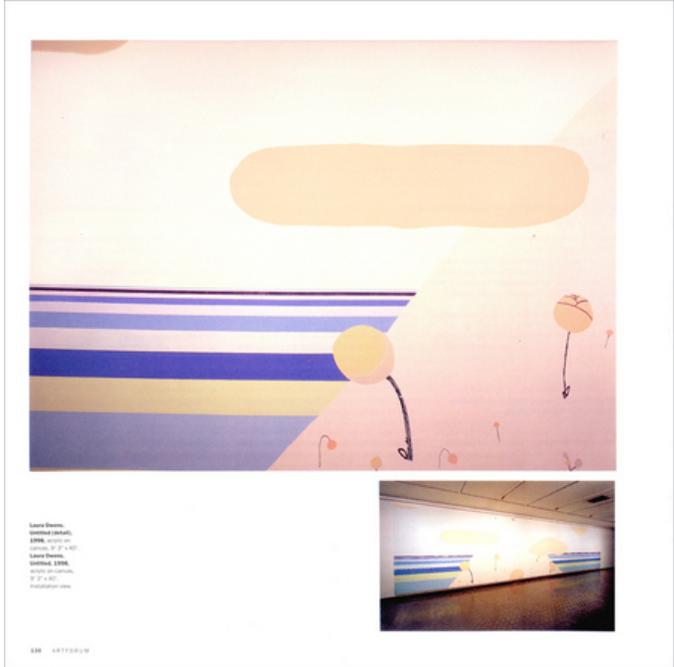
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Laura Owens, Untitled (detail), 1976, acrylic on canvas, 77 1/2 x 107 1/2 inches. Owens, Untitled, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 77 1/2 x 107 1/2 inches. Installation view.



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