

create!

Art, Geometry, & Psychoanalysis: Interview with Emily Weiner

By Christina Nafziger | 13 March 2024

Viewing Emily Weiner's paintings is nothing short of spiritual. The geometry within her work is sacred, employing symmetry to create tranquility and balance. Like the Transcendentalist painters of the 30s and 40s, whose art was rooted in abstraction with a spiritual intent, Weiner captures the hues, shapes, and energy of the ethereal, of the elements of our world we cannot understand. Along with this art movement, the artist is also inspired by psychoanalysis, explaining that she "considers the art canon through a feminist and Jungian lens." Enhancing her already magical paintings are her custom, one-of-a-kind frames, which she build special for each piece. These frames are each an extension of the painting itself, adding another layer of whimsy and depth.

Originally from Brooklyn, Weiner now resides in the smaller but artistically vibrant city of Nashville. In this interview, the artist tells us about the way simple shapes can form powerful archetypes, how ink-blot tests influence her work, and why she made the move from Brooklyn to Nashville.

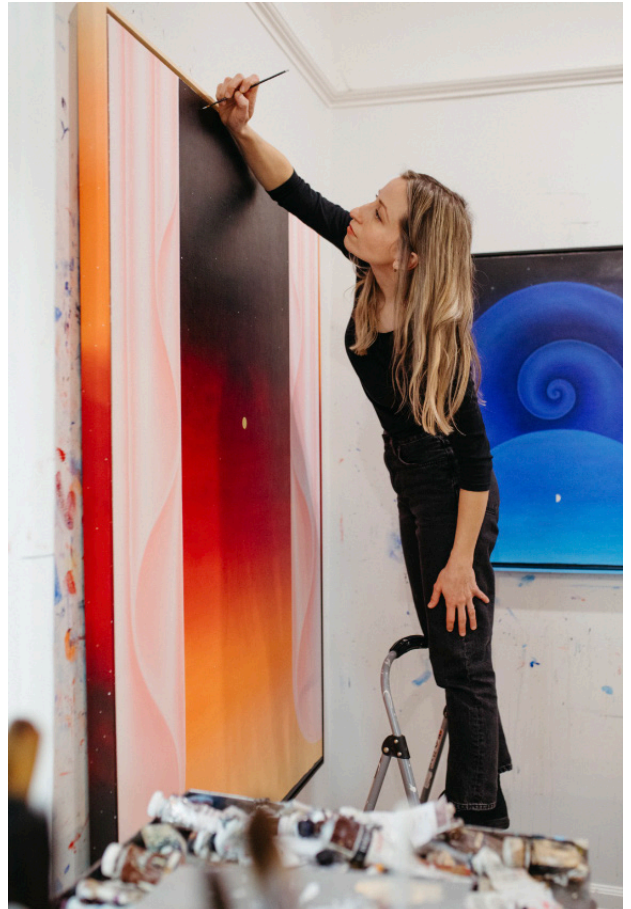
Where did your drive for creating stem from? Did you begin painting at a young age?

I'm not sure where my drive for creating came from, but from as far back as kindergarten I remember being drawn to making things. I naturally gravitated toward art. Unlike sports or other competitive activities, I could focus on drawing and get lost in it for hours on end.

I'm very drawn to the (often symmetrical) geometry present in your work. Can you talk about this element of your compositions?

My symmetrical paintings started in graduate school. They were landscapes that were mirrored from a center line, and were reminiscent of Rorschach blots—those old-school ink blobs that psychoanalysts used to discover the nuances of a patient's perception. While the technical aspects of my paintings have changed quite a bit since then, the symmetry has remained a compositional element that recurs in my work. Geometry is always interesting to me because even the simplest shapes are powerfully archetypal: the circle implying eternal return, the triangle as a power structure, or the spiral as a symbol of infinity.

Your frames tend to be very specific, with their shape and color changing from one painting to the next. Do you create each frame specifically tailored to each painting?



Emily Weiner's studio, Nashville, TN, 2024.
Photo by Jessie Watts.

Ceramic slabs become unruly in the kiln when they're over a certain size, so I make wood frames for my larger paintings. Regardless of material, each frame is made specifically for each painting. The painted wood frames are often an inversion of the colors or symbolic elements in a painting. The ceramic frames are more plastic, so their shape and glaze can echo and accentuate what is happening inside the work.

Your paintings seem almost mythical or cosmic, bringing to mind the work of the Transcendentalists. Do you find inspiration in this movement? (If not, what movement does inspire you?)

Yes, formally, I find a lot of inspiration in paintings by Agnes Pelton and fellow desert transcendentalists. I also find equal inspiration from artists outside that movement, ranging from Italian Renaissance painters like Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, to artists that don't fit neatly into any single categorical movement, such as Deborah Remington, Charles Burchfield, Forrest Bess, and Gerhard Richter, as well as so many contemporary artists working today. Outside of art, I'm always obliquely inspired by theoretical physics—not that I understand any of the mathematics, or grasp any large percentage of its theories—but I love the wild explanations that scientists propose to describe a reality impossible to witness by the human senses alone.

Can you tell us about a highlight you had from last year, whether it is art related or not?

My son started kindergarten and turned six. He likes his public school. That might sound boring, but to have reliable care and free education for your kid, after years of the opposite, it feels like a coup!

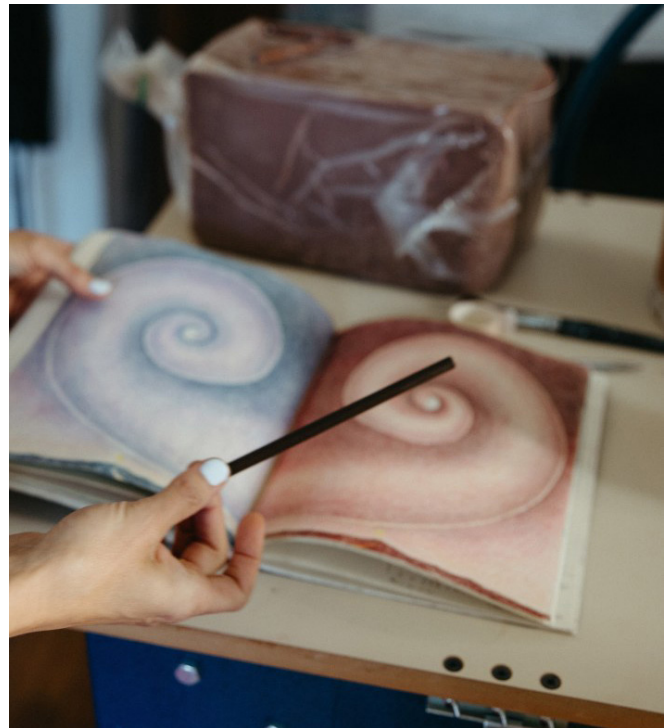
How would you describe the art scene in Nashville? What brought you there from Brooklyn?

The art scene in Nashville is small but not insignificant. Nashville calls itself “The Athens of the South” because there are so many universities here—including Fisk, Vanderbilt, Watkins College of Art/Belmont, and TSU. Where there are Universities there are teaching artists, and art students who stay after graduating. There are several artist-run spaces as well as commercial galleries, and the community comes together for openings on the first Saturday of each month, so openings tend to be more robust than you'd expect in a small (but growing) city.

I wound up here because living in NYC with a small child wasn't tenable in the long term. I was adjunct teaching at schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and during my first year as a mother I was dropping off my baby at part-time day care in between subway stops to classes, pumping in the restroom, and burning out. My husband was raised in Tennessee, so we defected to be closer to family and a good community of friends he had met during his college years in Nashville.

If you could have a two-person exhibition with any artist throughout history, who would it be and why?

Carl Jung! I would show his Red Book illustrations and ask him for psychoanalysis.



*Emily Weiner's studio, Nashville, TN, 2024.
Photo by Jessie Watts.*