

Yolanda Sánchez: Fruition

Yolanda Sánchez's art involves organized treatments of color—strong, bold, rich, and satisfying. The sensation of the rapid passage of time and the quick rendering of the work emerges from the loose boundaries around her primary forms, suggesting they just arrived into view or burst onto the scene. The viewer gets a sense of motion because the light vibrates, illuminating the surface on the canvas. The white surrounding the brilliant colored strokes or the silhouette created around the profile of the dazzling and vivid colors used in the textile pieces changes the experience. The artist provides just enough transparency to give her surfaces glowing appearances, adding to the glitz of the selected colors. Looking at some art historical prototypes, many unconnected to the artist's intention will allow a glimpse into some of the ways Sánchez orders nature, connects it to invention and insight, and reveals or suggests places and spaces.

In meditating on the shapes, forms, lines, strokes, compositions, and materials in Sánchez's artworks in this current exhibition, "The Earth Laughs in Flowers," I found I wavered between the present and the elsewhere. I realized I saw the work, yet I also glimpsed memories of colors and brushstrokes seen in other art. To develop my thinking about this body of work, I explored those oft-immediate parallels or glimmers at the edges of my consciousness, some ideas prompted by conversations with the artist.¹ The titles directed my thinking about the paintings to moods, to evocations of experiences. At the same time, the dominant vertical shape or horizontal axis in the fabric hangings suggested personages or outstretched arms.

The arabesque lines, the segmentation of the brushstrokes sometimes layered and other times left thin, the canyons of energy, the activation of the painted space, the traces showing the sweeps of the artist's hand, the brilliant colors, and the sweeping gesture recalled the Romantic embrace of the land. The robust burst of giddy, vivid energy swirling at the center of the space in Sánchez's paintings conjure memories before the famed *Starry Night* of 1889 by Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) in the fireworks show the artist gives the viewer.

The landscape undulates, the sky swirls. The failed Dutch theology student-turned-artist Vincent Van Gogh left turned his attentions to *Japonisme*, the love of all things Japanese prevalent in the first part of the 19th century, especially in France, that he had first encountered in Antwerp. When he relocated to Paris, he immersed himself in the study of Japanese prints.² He became enamored with how the prints revealed images of the natural world, humanity out in the world, different atmospheric effects, activity centered in the composition, or open space areas.

¹ Telephone conversations with Yolanda Sánchez, May 12, 2021 and August 2, 2021. The interpretation of the artist's remarks represents my understanding except where I directly quote her.

² The Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam has an excellent multimedia narrative about Van Gogh's interest in *Japonisme*. (See "Meet Vincent: Inspiration from Japan," *Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam*, accessed September 3, 2021 [<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/stories/inspiration-from-japan>]).

Living with his brother Theo (1857-1891), an art dealer and his main patron, they actively collected them, and Van Gogh felt guided to paint nature. This experience, this encounter, drew him to seek more land to paint. He also wanted softer light and a wider range of natural colors, which he deemed a more Japanese way of seeing, influenced by the prints he admired. He decided to move to Provence, in the south of France. Specifically, he relocated to Arles early in 1888 during snow and wind. Rapidly, the weather warmed in that temperate region, and the artist became captivated by the brilliant blossoming trees and blooms. Many Arles paintings focus on flowering trees in the landscape or the branch with blossoms as a still life.³ With sudden earnestness, he saturated the colors, making them more intense. The world became robust, alive, and bright in his paintings there. Nature became a place of refuge for Van Gogh.

That idea of care, of finding a place for safeguarding, is how Sánchez presents thought and emotional landscapes to her viewers. Her paintings and textiles do not depict, portray, or represent; instead, they infer, manifest, and provoke. This era no longer offers safety for presumptions that land, sky, air, and sea will exist ever in abundance. Limits do exist. Nature is no longer a boundless place of yield. However, Sánchez proffers strength in the grand embrace of beauty found in the world, in nature all around. When Van Gogh made his paintings, the Industrial Revolution changed European countries into interconnected places but riddled the land with noise, activity, and risk. By going away from the city, Van Gogh thought he found a more authentic connection to his vision, to nature. Within Sánchez's sensate landscapes, there's a removal from the stresses of daily life.

Sánchez made no such move to the remote countryside, yet the works show a bright beauty, a world filled with possibilities. A longtime resident of Miami, and Miami Beach, in particular, the artist surrounds herself with the city. Yet, Miami remains one of the unique urban centers that, despite its densely populated areas, remains attached to its glowing light, tropical plants, thriving gardens, and lush beaches. Progress for her does not diminish the freedom to enjoy the space and place. Speaking broadly about her work, she noted: "The light and the color create the sense of place."⁴ The joy and invigoration of her art awakened elated ideas about nature and the land, almost fantastic ideals.

The artist's sensitivity to capture the encounter with the beautiful, that for anyone familiar with Miami's light and coast, could suggest its environs, especially in the recurrence of the pink. While all her strokes and textiles do not involve pink, it is a perennial experience in art on view in this show. Sánchez ascribes pink and her interest in it to multi-dimensional concerns. These span gender identifications and their complications. They continue to beauty and sensuality or the sentimentality of valentines and the attraction of flowers, but much more. Pink in Sanchez's paintings and textiles implies multi-dimensional possibilities. It appeals to many artists because it references the body, the blood flowing under the skin yet apparent in the flesh of all shades,

³ The Arles paintings number 185, made between February 1888 and April 1889.

⁴ Email correspondence with Yolanda Sánchez, August 2, 2021.

and suggests robust life. Many flora and fauna share pink colors and tones. However, pink involves opposite ends of the visible color spectrum using red and purple light.⁵ The profusion of pink for anyone familiar with Miami prompts contemplation of *Surrounded Islands* installed in 1983 by artists Christo (1935-2020) and Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009).⁶ The fabric extended out and around the eleven islands looked like giant water lilies, writ large from famed Giverny gardens near Paris of French Impressionist Claude Monet (1840-1926) and his series of paintings of the same name. Monet planned his gardens meticulously, relying on many international gardening manuals in his library, to ensure shared blooms, thus intensifying colors in the planar space of his canvases.⁷ Christo and Jeanne-Claude liked the proliferation of pink throughout Miami life, culture, and land.

Any casual observer will see pink abounds in this part of Florida, unlike other areas. The natural pinks vary widely. These pinks oscillate between the bright Day-Glo pink flamingos and the pink birds sometimes found in the former Parrot Jungle. They continue to the robust erotic pinks of the topical flowers and, perhaps most abundant, the blush full-blooded pink of its fall and winter sunsets. The 1980s would give the world “Miami Vice” bubble-gum pink, but the history extends further. Laden with pinks, Miami’s built environment range widely, including Art Deco pinks of Miami Beach architecture, the dusty, lemonade pink found at places like the Fab Fifties Eden Roc Hotel, the salmon-orange pinks of Coral Gables homes and buildings, neon-pinks of *Miami Line* by Rockne Krebs (1938-2011) or the Miami Tower by I.M. Pei (1917-2019) or the long-lost silver-pink of the Dadeland Sea Horse or the blush pink of the demolished trompe l’oeil Collins Avenue peek into the Fontainebleau Hotel by Richard Haas (1936-). Now Miami offers fuchsia on its basketball team uniforms. Its ubiquity impresses its importance upon the resident, visitor, and anyone seeking visual pleasure.

Any reference to Miami contains heat. The spectacularly high temperatures bring a flush to the face of anyone spending time there. That blush includes the variety of pinks Sánchez evokes in many of her artworks.⁸ When it is pale, it has a tint, meaning the color consists of white to

⁵ Michael Moyer, “Observations: Stop This Absurd War on the Color Pink,” *Scientific American* (March 5, 2012), <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/stop-this-absurd-war-on-the-color-pink/>.

⁶ The work existed for two weeks in 1983, after three years of planning in Biscayne Bay, between the city of Miami, North Miami, the Village of Miami Shores, and Miami Beach.

⁷ British curator Ann Dumas discusses the importance of garden planning to Monet’s art in her exhibition catalogue essay “Monet’s Garden at Giverny,” in *Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse*, edited by William H. Robinson and Ann Dumas (London and Cleveland: Royal Academy of Arts and The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015): 46-65. The organizational system Monet used in his gardens serves as a framing component of the whole exhibition catalogue.

⁸ Specific discussion about the color pink requires reference to American performance artist Joanna Frueh’s many meditations on the subject, particularly “The Performance of Pink (2003).” See the various performance documents in Joanna Frueh, *Clairvoyance (for those in the desert): performance pieces, 1979-2004* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

lighten it. This pale pink is delicate, feminine, romantic. It recalls the orchid and its rapid bloom, tender and requiring patience, responsible nurturing. Alternately, and perhaps more often, the hot pink arises. This one is the color of protest and pleasure. It is shaded, darkened with black, which manifests shock or rebellion. The pink genitalia and the beauty that rush blood in a state of ecstasy embody desire—literalize it, make it real.

Many contemporary artists probe abstraction to depict inner states of being. Among the American women using it to consider inner landscapes or the flow of poetry include Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) and Joan Snyder (1940-). But Sánchez, in contrast to the others, remains resolutely concerned with protection and tenderness. Her abstraction more closely aligns with that of Joan Mitchell (1925-1992). Mitchell became captivated with the landscapes of southern France, like many artists in the past. Sánchez shares an incandescent view of the landscape or floriculture with Mitchell. But, she diverges from the earlier artist in that the creeping sense of mortality is not ever-present in her work. Instead, Sánchez's art feels recuperative and invigorating, more akin to a fiesta or the motion of the dance.

And with dance, music continues as a concern for Sánchez, what she describes as necessary. English art critic Walter Pater (1839-1894) once remarked: "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."⁹ The constant dilemma for artists, such as Sánchez working with fixed materials, addresses ways to incorporate the feeling and consciousness of movement and motion. If one knows about the photographic interest in imaging the passage of time, then the name of English photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) will quickly come to mind. He's the photographer most readily recognized for his pioneering work in photographic studies of human and animal motion and his invention of the zoopraxiscope, also spoken about as a "magic lantern," an early device for projecting moving images and a precursor to the movie projector. The photographs show repeated moments of figures—human or animal—progressing in space. For example, he used his photographs to depict the moment when a horse had all four legs off the ground at once. He focused on the individual "frame" of movement in separate photographs, then put them into a sequence to suggest motion.¹⁰ By contrast, the French scientist Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) looked at progressive action stages in a single image to reveal the overall movement. Photographers later in the 20th and 21st centuries manipulate their shutters to freeze and blur motion. Painters like Sánchez adapt their materials to achieve such effects.

There's a mood in all art. The surface activity in Sánchez's canvases and the kaleidoscopic effects of her segmented fabric compositions point to the artist's encounter with the materials and the challenge of being an artist. Expressing oneself fully and making oneself open represent complex tasks. While many people label themselves artists, few achieve professional stature. Artistic hope for communication through the work remains a tedious or trying process. Her art

⁹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*, edited and with an introduction by Adam Philips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p 86.

¹⁰ Anne Swartz, "A Redating of Kupka's "Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors II," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 80, No. 8 (October 1993): 345, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25161424>.

embodies her vigor and incandescence, which draws the viewer towards an Arcadian view of a worthwhile world. The scale of the forms in the compositional space, the sequencing of strokes, and the balance of the image to the surrounding area harmonize. In the canvas space, the overall impact reminds of quick glimpses, feeling enlivening rather than chaotic. The color choices and the irregular repetition of forms adds a sense of haphazardness to the textiles. But rather than seeming spasmodic or conveying volatility, the unifying shape gives a heft, a sense of solidity, even to the more translucent or gossamer-looking hangings.

Whether working with paint or fabric, Sánchez engages with the selected medium to realize her ideas about beauty. At the crux of her shifts between different media lies the particular phenomenon each provides the artist. Fueled by her creative drive, her thoughts propel her towards certain materials to identify what will work best for her in a given moment or series. With Sánchez, the materials convey the mutable and the natural qualities central to her imagery, subject matter, compositions, and forms.

Sánchez's repetitive stroke, applied in staccato and syncopated motions, suggests capturing and holding time, which persists as an artistic concern. In Japanese culture, cherry blossoms endure as a symbol of transience—the abundant flowering of the garden long captivated artists in many cultures. In 17th Dutch Baroque art, women painters became active as still life artists because the culture regarded it as a lesser genre or subject matter than history painting. One of the main images in Dutch still life paintings is the image of the beautiful flower at the peak of its bloom. Often the artist showed tulips, a by-product of the Tulipomania then prevalent, while also demonstrating the reach of the Dutch Empire, its colonizing conquerors returning to the homeland with exotic new flora found during their travels.

A long history of wanting love recurs as a theme in art. In her titles, Sánchez gives the viewer notions of searching and wondering. In the 18th century, French Rococo painters wanted to reveal the passage of time and the sense of melancholy the lover feels when unable to sate the desire. The *profil perdu*, or lost profile, became a standard device commonly used in painting during that era by those artists of a turned head, where the face remains partially in view while the eyes look beyond or out of frame. Scenes of leisure, often with mythological or allegorical overtones, and typically in pastoral landscapes, functioned as settings for the beloved to try to attain the inaccessible and, therefore, an unquenched object of desire. But the works in this exhibition do not embody longing as quality of yearning. Instead, they suggest eagerness or even the state of being bewitched.

The geometric imposition of the stroke and the rectilinear form of the textile components perhaps compel this response. The application of paint and the construction of the fiber work necessitates systematic, methodical adjustments on the artist's part. Sánchez uses geometric abstraction to give the viewer ownership and autonomy in discovering her creativity, her inner landscapes.

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