

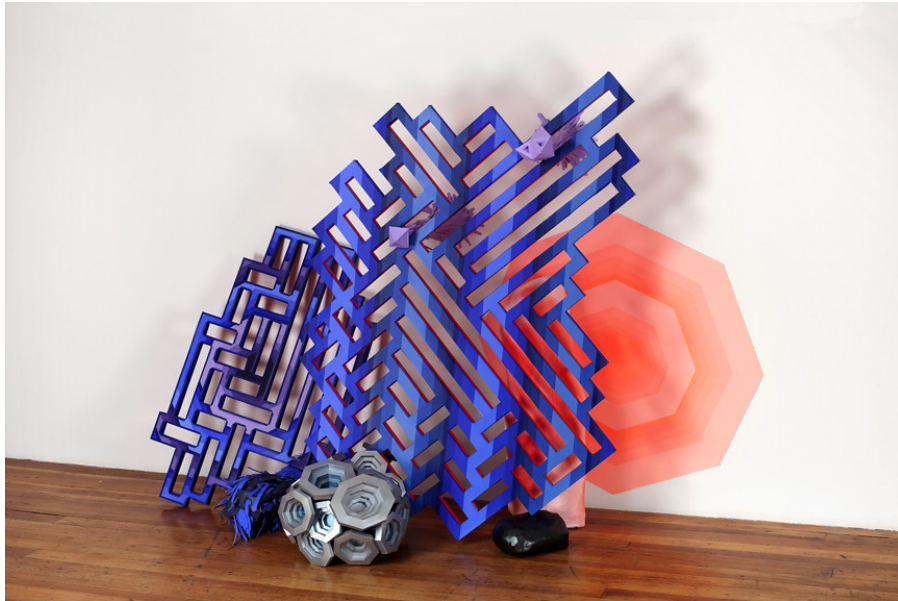
An Interview with Lauren Clay

by Nastia Voynovskaya Posted on October 23, 2011



[Lauren Clay](#)'s regimented sculptures seem to grow out of gallery walls like intergalactic plant life or rock formations — their repeating parts coalesce into fluid organic shapes, inviting the

viewer to imagine what the Earth might have been like if nature evolved from a neon color palette. Part intellectual and part spontaneous, Clay's meticulous constructions flow out of the artist's philosophical explorations. Lauren took a moment to chat with Nastia Voynovskaya about art history, the mysterious titles of her works and the ins-and-outs of papier-mâché. – [Nastia Voynovskoya](#)



What is your artistic background and how did you come to work with paper sculptures?

I have a background in painting, but my work has always had a very spatial, sculptural aspect to it. This body of work began as large paintings on paper. Over time the work became more and more sculptural because I became intrigued with the natural tendency of the paper to curl off of the wall. I also found it important for the work to exist in the viewer's physical space, rather than for it to remain depicted in a pictorial space. The work seems simultaneously impossible spatially, but very present.



The forms in your drawings and sculptures are very geometric, though they have an organic quality, almost like crystals or moss. How do you perceive these shapes and where do they come from?

The geometric forms usually subtly reference formal devices of Modernist art. Often the reoccurring forms in my work are also a play on Modernist seriality, which in my work becomes a symbol of abundance and providence. There is also something very American and protestant about this impulse. Exploiting my own relationship with art history parallels a more mundane relationship with authority or inheritance.

In my work these forms of modernism (monochrome painting, the grid, the plinth), become simply what they are: geometric forms that by their own nature seem to reproduce themselves and exist in patterns of various scale and various permutations of infinity.



Your sculptures are composed of many layers of different techniques. Can you describe your process of constructing them?

Usually I begin by making a really simple armature out of wood. Then I begin to construct around it—usually with paper or different types of papier-mâché. Every sculpture I make goes through several stages of painting, sanding and repainting.

Usually I have a general impulse for a piece, but it evolves a lot as I'm working on it. As I continue to research and dwell on the piece it tends to collect a more complex system of references and double meanings. The process is also part of the search.



The titles of your works, like “Granny Takes a Trip,” or “The Unending Amends We’ve Made (Imperishable wreath)” seem to refer to some kind of narrative. Do you have a background story in mind when constructing your sculptures?

The titles usually reference a specific place, or thing from history, pop culture or literature. For example, Granny Takes a Trip was the name of a hipster clothing store in 1960s London, for the people and musicians of the psychedelic movement. It’s where Jimi Hendrix bought one of his signature military jackets.

The candy-colored palate you use gives your works a fun, almost comical quality. Is a sense of lightness important in your approach to abstraction?

I think humor is part of the work because although most of my work is very sincere I think it’s impossible to ignore the awkward, fumbling feeling that comes along with any philosophical

pursuit, whether it's art related or spiritual. I think it's healthy to admit how silly and awkward it feels to address the infinite or our own history.



What are you currently working on? Do you have any upcoming projects that you would like to mention?

I'm in the process of starting a new body of work that is pretty heavily influenced by European and Early American decorative arts. Lately I've also become interested in the history of skilled labor and crafts in the United States. I've also been learning a lot about traditional decorative painting techniques, which will probably play a large part in my new work.

Also, I just finished a sculpture that is going to be used as the cover art for my brother, Daniel Clay's new album, *The Ten Thousand Things*. The album is really amazing and I'm really excited about it. I think our work and thoughts and concepts overlap in so many ways. The album comes out this fall. You can find more info about it here: danielclaymusic.com



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