LOCAL NEWS MATTERS
BAY AREA

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# Explaining the NFT, a new way for artists and content creators to make a living

by **Joe Dworetzky, Bay City News Foundation** May 22, 2021

Seattle-based artist Jaq Chartier, who currently has a physical show at San Francisco's Dolby Chadwick Gallery, plans to sell a video, "SunTest #8 (Time-Lapse)," as an NFT in three editions. (Photo courtesy Jordan Steward/Vulcan Inc.)

NFTs — those magical beans that can supposedly transform the dross of digital artwork into strands of gold — may also have the power to turn a social network into a platform for creative people to make creative income.

The basic economics of social media are not hard to understand.

Social media companies make the bulk of their money by selling ads to online advertisers.

Advertisers pay for their ads to appear on platforms that have large audiences.

Audiences are drawn to platforms where users post interesting, engaging, attention-grabbing content.

The creators of that content — the photographers and artists who post to Instagram, the journalists and writers who link their work to tweets, the dancers and choreographers who entertain on TikTok — are largely uncompensated for what they create.

And while the content creators get the psychological capital of likes and follows, it is Instagram, Twitter and TikTok that get the money.

It is a great system for large social-media companies, but if one cares about the creators, it is a problem.

Katie Geminder — it rhymes with reminder — has she appeared in many important moments of

tech history.

Between 1999 and 2012, she worked in succession at Amazon, Apple, Facebook, MySpace and Zynga.

Her LinkedIn profile says that she has spent most of her career in user design and experience, though that doesn't cover all her roles. She says she works in the "sweet spot between qualitative and quantitative."

"I'm an empath, so I feel," Geminder says. "I can put myself in someone else's shoes and experience a product, and I think that's where my mojo comes from."

Though she doesn't consider herself a techie — she says she's "numbers dyslexic" — a search on the website Justia returns her name on a series of patents beginning in 2006; in each, she is listed as one of the inventors, along with Mark Zuckerberg and a handful of others.

"One of the things I'm good at is being a translator and taking complex ideas and distilling them down so that anyone in the company can understand it," she says.

That's a key skill in the emerging world of NFTs where Cent.co, the San Francisco startup that Geminder co-founded, is making its mark.

"There's a big froth around NFTs and crypto and blockchain," Geminder says. "My personal opinion is it all gets munged together in a way that is not helpful."

Cent.co co-founder Katie Geminder visited the Global Seed Vault in Svalbard, Norway, in early 2020. The vault, which preserves duplicates from seed banks around the world, is easy to spot, thanks to Dyveke Sanne's illuminated artwork, "Perpetual Repercussion." (Photo courtesy Guy Veysey)

The different components have to be separated and understood individually before the combination makes sense.

"I had to do that for myself," she says, "before I actually pushed my chips all in."

Over the last several months, the public has been inundated with stories about digital artists scoring head-scratchingly large paydays by selling NFTs to buyers besot with auction fever, though what is being sold and why someone might want to buy one have been harder to understand.

One reason is that when people explain NFTs, they are forced to use analogies to the workings of the tangible world. But analogies only go so far; NFTs and their cousins, cryptocurrencies and blockchain, are creatures of the digital world, intangible by nature and endowed with characteristics not always found in our tangible, physical space.

In some ways, blockchain is the easiest one to explain. When people talk of blockchain they are generally referring to a "public" computer program that runs on computers all over the world.

No single user or company or organization controls the program. Instead, a decentralized community of computers constantly attends to the chain, processing and verifying transactions.

A new "block" of computer code can be added to the chain, but only at the end of the program.

In order to add a new block, some number of the computers on the decentralized network have to process the code and validate and confirm its integrity. Those computers — or those who own those computers — are often called miners, and they get paid for their work.

How are miners paid? When the blockchain was created, the issuance of intangible units of value referred to as tokens or coins were programmed into the chain, and those tokens or coins are referred to as a cryptocurrency.

***"I don't think anybody can look at you with a straight face and tell you they know how exactly this is going to play out over the longer term."***

TEDDY FUSARO, PRESIDENT OF BITWISE ASSET MANAGEMENT

The blockchain that was used to create the first cryptocurrency — Bitcoin — was designed solely to create a decentralized system of currency that would be a store of value and would operate independently from the centralized currencies of the world — the dollar, the euro, the renminbi — that are generically referred to as "fiat."

But a blockchain need not be used solely to create and support a currency. Other public blockchains were built to do many things, and this has created a foundation for a new decentralized type of worldwide computing network.

Ethereum, like Bitcoin, is a decentralized public blockchain. Ethereum was designed to facilitate "smart contracts" that allow transactions to occur automatically when a specific set of predefined conditions occur, as long as the required number of computers maintaining the network reach consensus that the conditions have been satisfied.

Thus, instead of a single network owner authorizing a transaction, it occurs simply as a result of the predetermined conditions being fulfilled. This functionality allows Ethereum to be used for purposes far beyond supporting a currency.

But that is not to say that there is no currency on the Ethereum blockchain. Computers on the Ethereum network still need to be incentivized to process transactions, and on the Ethereum chain, that incentive is the opportunity to earn Ether — the native coin of the Ethereum blockchain.

Crypto coins are intangibles, but it should be no surprise that intangible coins can have value as measured in fiat. The miles that frequent flyers earn by flying or the points that frequent shoppers accumulate by using their credit cards — are each digital currencies of a sort — and they can be exchanged or traded or used to buy tangible items.

Just before COVID-19 locked the world down, Geminder took two trips. First, she went to

Svalbard, far in the northern reaches of Norway, about as close as you can get to the North Pole without joining an expedition.

During the six days she spent there, Svalbard was dark for 24 hours a day. It wasn't intentional — Geminder concedes there were some failures of due diligence in the planning stage — but it had an important result of forcing her to spend a week in darkness.

"I think that weird pattern-interrupt absolutely reprogrammed my brain," she says.

Not long after, she traveled to South Africa — where she was held up at gunpoint in a camera store — before jumping off on a trip to see mountain gorillas in the wilds of Uganda.

Perhaps conditioned by the days in Norway's darkness and the "weird, weird" encounter in South Africa, some of the things that she saw in Uganda hit her in a deep and emotional way.

Katie Geminder, co-founder of Cent.co, tours Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda in March 2020. (Photo courtesy Athol Moult)

Hiking in the backcountry, she saw local craftsmen and women creating carvings and renderings of exquisite quality, but being paid pennies for their work. She saw an entire country where people were conducting all of their affairs on their cell phones. No one used cash; money moved back and forth exclusively on a digital platform.

She returned to the States on March 13, 2020, just as the full force of the pandemic was bearing down on the Bay Area. She quickly saw its powerful, destructive force unleashed in her home community.

As the pandemic blanketed the area, she saw creative people stepping to the forefront to do things for others — making masks, delivering food, caring for the most vulnerable — but all of the creatives she knew — artists, musicians, photographers — had been supporting their creative passions by working in restaurants and coffee shops and bars and galleries. And now all those jobs were shut down.

"Everything just swirled into focus for me." She had an epiphany.

Creative people needed a platform where they could support themselves through their creative work.

NFT stands for “non-fungible token” and, in that respect, it is fundamentally distinct from the tokens that are cryptocurrency. Coins are designed to be fully fungible.

Non-fungibility is an NFT’s superpower. Each token has a single unique identifier that — once connected to a digital asset — creates something that didn’t heretofore exist in the digital world.

Because digital assets were infinitely duplicable, and each duplicated copy was an exact replica of the one from which it sprang, digital assets were all the same.

A digital recording of Bob Dylan’s “Positively 4th Street” and a digital copy of that recording were but two manifestations of the same thing, neither with greater dignity than the other. And the owner, absent copyright limitations, could create an infinite number of exact duplicates, meaning that the value that *scarcity* adds to an asset did not attach to digital assets.

With NFTs, that proposition has changed.

Before she left on her travels, Geminder had been advising a San Francisco company called Cent. Cent began in 2017 as a social network for digital artists to share their work and a place fans could follow and support that work.

Cent was experimenting with ways that the artists could monetize their work.

The company’s co-founder, Cameron Hejazi, described Cent’s initial idea as building a new social network on which all “the actions that you do on a social network, like posting, replying, liking, retweeting … [would be] all incentivized so that when a user took a particular action in some way, there was financial value bundled with that action.”

Then Geminder and Hejazi considered if there was a way you could monetize work already posted to an existing social network.

***“There’s a younger generation that [doesn’t] even go into galleries. They don’t care about the physical object.”***

JAQ CHARTIER, ARTIST

That led to an improbable-seeming hypothesis: There might be a market for people to buy and sell tweets, if the tweets were turned into NFTs.

They imagined that buying a tweet would be like getting an autographed baseball card. The NFT would contain an immutable digital receipt that showed who was the one unique owner of that tweet.

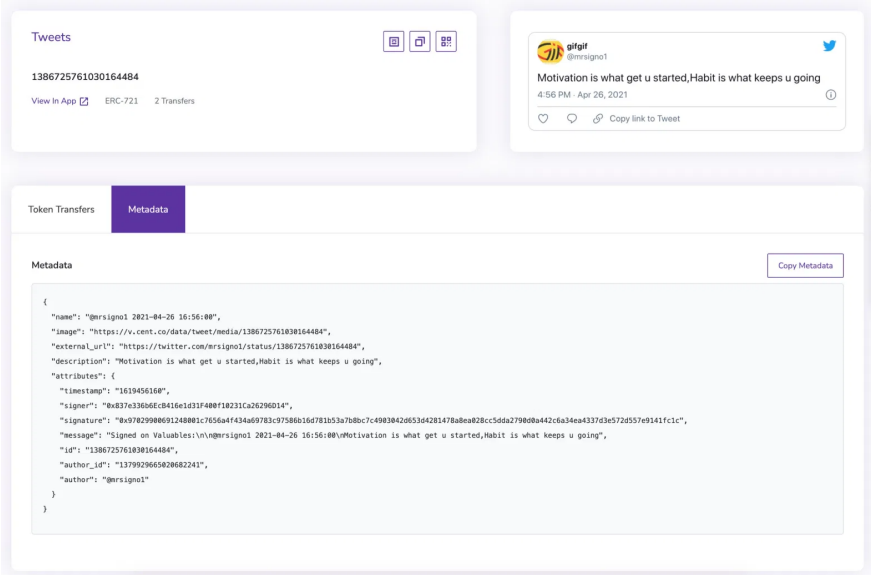
Like a baseball card, the NFT could be traded or sold or held forever as a precious collectible.

To test the idea, Cent lashed together an app called Valuables that sat on top of the Cent network

and allowed users to buy and sell tweets.

Valuables went live in December of 2020.

At the beginning, it was all an experiment. Their conjecture was that a fan would “collect” the work of a favored creator by offering to buy a tweet. The app allowed competitive bidding, so there was the possibility of multiple bids for a tweet. If an offer was accepted, the tweet would be “minted” into an NFT, and the blockchain would then hold an immutable digital receipt that showed that the buyer was the one unique owner of that tweet.




Here’s a screenshot of a tweet that has been minted into an NFT on the Valuables platform. In the upper right corner is the text of the tweet. In the upper left is the unique identifier of the NFT, and below is the information included with the NFT. (Photo courtesy Cent.co)

Other people could still access the tweet on Twitter, but only one person owned the original tweet. It was like having the first edition of a book; the book was the same as the book in every other edition, but more valuable because no more first editions could be created.

The concept seemed to work. People were using Valuables. They were actually bidding for tweets. Ether — the unit of payment on Valuables — was changing hands. Not lots of money, but proof of concept.

Then something transformative happened.

Someone on Valuables offered to buy the first tweet that Jack Dorsey, the founder of Twitter, ever tweeted: the March 21, 2006, tweet that said, “just setting up my twttr.”

Multiple users lobbed in bids. The price escalated.

Dorsey closed the auction by accepting an offer of $2.9 million in March of 2021, almost exactly 15 years from his tweet’s initial posting.

It was a big deal for the startup.

Geminder says, “my head exploded.” The best part was that it didn’t happen because Cent pitched the idea to Dorsey. It just happened organically.

And the icing on the cake was that Dorsey donated the proceeds of sale to COVID-19 victims in Africa.

Cent created the future rules and terms for the sale for NFTs on its platform. On the first sale, Cent retains 5%, and the creator takes 95%. On a subsequent sale, Cent gets 2.5%, the original creator gets 10% and the seller gets 87.5%. If over the years a tweet is sold and resold a dozen times, the creator will keep getting 10% of each sale price, a continuing royalty.

The Twitter application is just one area of experimentation. Cent is raising funds to create additional apps to allow creators on other platforms to monetize their work by minting them as NFTs. Hejazi thinks of it as a way to give creators the tools — whatever platform they are working on — “to be able to unlock the value through NFTs.”

The blockchain is flexible; any digital work of art — a song, a story, a drawing, a video — can be minted into an NFT and made available for sale and purchase.

NFTs make digital assets collectable. Put differently, from an investor perspective, NFTs are a new class of assets.

Teddy Fusaro is the president of San Francisco-based Bitwise Asset Management, a “specialist cryptocurrency asset management firm” that serves as an asset manager for cryptocurrencies.

Bitwise creates and manages funds that invest in cryptocurrencies. Its investors are “accredited investors” — pension funds, trusts, high rollers, family offices — that want to get in on the potentially lucrative world of cryptocurrencies.

***“If we get our flywheel going and then other businesses [that] are creators are on our platform and get their own flywheels going, then we can change people’s lives all over the world.”***

KATIE GEMINDER, CO-FOUNDER OF CENT.CO

Bitwise makes it relatively easy for investors who are not comfortable with the arcane ecosystem to participate. Bitwise handles the technical work of managing the digital assets for the funds and investors.

“Our investors don’t tend to be the 25-year-old whiz kid who’s good at figuring out how to invest in crypto on an app,” Fusaro says. “It tends to be a more experienced investor or a financial adviser or an institution that wants to get some exposure to this emerging asset class, but they’re not going to download an app from the App Store and wire money into it to figure out how to hold Bitcoin.”

Fusaro jokes that Bitwise is an “education company” with asset management added on because “anything that pops up in this crypto economy just requires so much education to those who are coming into it for the first time. And there’s always something new.”

According to Fusaro, Bitwise is one of the largest players in the space. So far Bitwise doesn't invest in NFTs but he is fielding a lot of questions from investors about them.

Non-fungibility makes NFTs very different from investing in crypto. Each NFT is different, and so each one has to be analyzed individually to understand what a buyer gets. Many of the parameters haven't been fully worked out. "We work within a very old regulatory framework that needs to evolve," Fusaro says.

"It's clear that the old rules aren't good enough to handle how fast the Internet is changing things," he continues. "I don't think anybody can look at you with a straight face and tell you they know how exactly this is going to play out over the longer term."

Adeniyi Abiodun is a software engineer who's been in the crypto space for nearly 10 years. Like Geminder and Hejazi, he is a believer in NFTs as a new and intuitive way that content creators can interact with their fans. If a creator has a thousand solid fans, he thinks they "can really keep a living as a creator."

Creators could end-run publishing companies and other "middlemen" by creating content that is exclusively owned and can be marketed to fans directly.

He finds the possibilities in this new world amazing. Fans or collectors can invest in a work, and "as I grow as an artist, they almost get an equity position in how I do."

Seattle-based artist Jaq Chartier, who currently has a physical show at San Francisco's Dolby Chadwick Gallery, plans to sell a video, "SunTest #8 (Time-Lapse)," as an NFT in three editions. (Photo courtesy Jordan Steward/Vulcan Inc.)

Jaq Chartier is a Seattle-based painter who shows her work at a gallery in San Francisco, as well as other places. She is in her 50s and came up creating tangible works of art. But NFTs caught her attention, and now she has minted one and is putting it up for sale.

Chartier describes her body of work as “old-school modernist abstract painting,” but she says they “are also experiments.”

Because she often works with materials that are not “orthodox,” she runs tests to measure the fastness of the stain or dye she is working with to see how it fades over time. From the testing, she has accumulated inks and dyes and stains that she doesn’t use in her paintings because they will fade and ultimately disappear.

A few years ago, she began to experiment with documenting the changes in an artwork as the ink faded.

As she worked in the area, Chartier realized that if she periodically scanned an image she could record how it changed over time. And if she strung the scanned images together, she could create a time-lapse of the initial work as it changed.

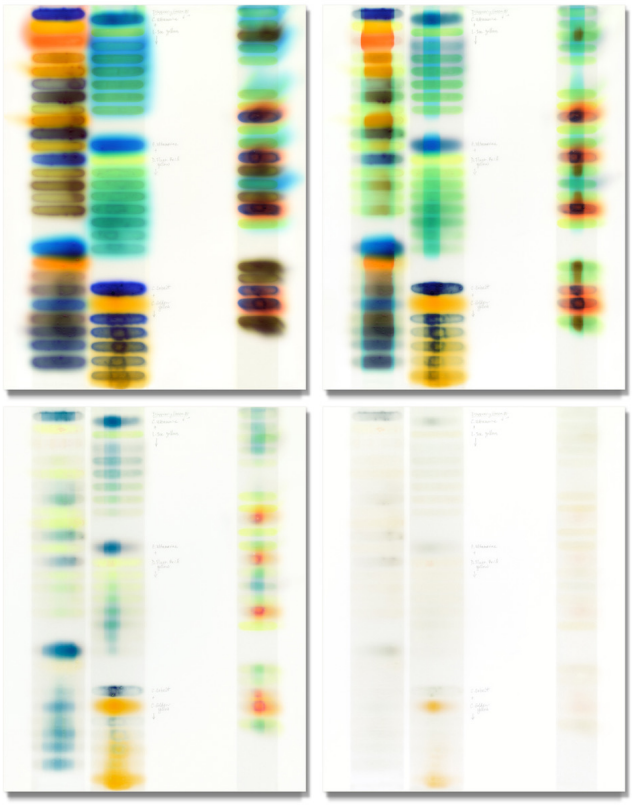
At first, her idea was to create a video that would illustrate the way that the work changed, and the video could be shown at one of her shows.

Then she heard about NFTs — there was a lot of publicity about artists selling NFTs, particularly after the digital artist Beeple’s $69 million sale of an NFT containing his work — and she wondered if she could mint the time-lapse on blockchain.

She decided to figure out how to do it.

Chartier succeeded in creating a piece called “SunTest #8 (Time-Lapse),” timed to coincide with an exhibition of her tangible art at the Dolby Chadwick Gallery in San Francisco, which runs through May 29.

She plans to sell “SunTest #8 (Time-Lapse)” as an NFT in three editions. As an experiment, when the gallery exhibition opened in early May, Chartier offered the first edition for sale on one of the new platforms that showcase NFTs. There was interest, though it didn’t sell right away.



Jaq Chartier's "SunTest #8 (Day 1, 5, 11, 31)" shows images of the same painting at four different times to illustrate how the inks and dyes she used almost disappeared. This piece is a work of tangible art currently displayed in her show at Dolby Chadwick Gallery. She also used these images in "SunTest #8 (Time-Lapse)," which she minted into an NFT. (Photo courtesy Jaq Chartier)

She isn't discouraged. The platform wasn't well-curated (a user could only search for the broad category "art"), and that made it incumbent on her to get the word out. She expects that will change as the market matures.

Chartier thinks of NFT sales as a way to expand the reach of her work. "There's a younger generation that [doesn't] even go into galleries," she says. "They don't care about the physical object."

Chartier sees NFTs as a positive thing for "artists who are completely digital and who don't really have gallery connections. I think it's an interesting way for them to finally have an audience and be able to get paid something from their work."

She thinks the "crazy hype" that has followed the multimillion-dollar sales of NFTs will "settle into just being another way of artists making work and getting it out there."

Cent's first promise to its community is "You have full control over the monetization and distribution of content you create, social actions you take and relationships you form with people online."

Geminder says "our whole thing is we're never going to have ads on Cent." She says she doesn't think that selling advertising is inherently bad, but it "makes companies make the wrong decision on behalf of the user."

She says that with Cent, she has found her mission in life. She has worked at many companies but never thought their missions were hers. "After 20 years, this one feels deeply personal," she

says.

The Renaissance came out of the plague, and out of COVID-19, Geminder thinks that "something is going to rise like a phoenix." She wants that to be a community of creators who make a creative income, and she intends to make that happen.

"If we get our flywheel going and then other businesses [that] are creators are on our platform and get their own flywheels going, then we can change people's lives all over the world," she says.

She knows that it is a massive lift and won't be done by Cent alone.

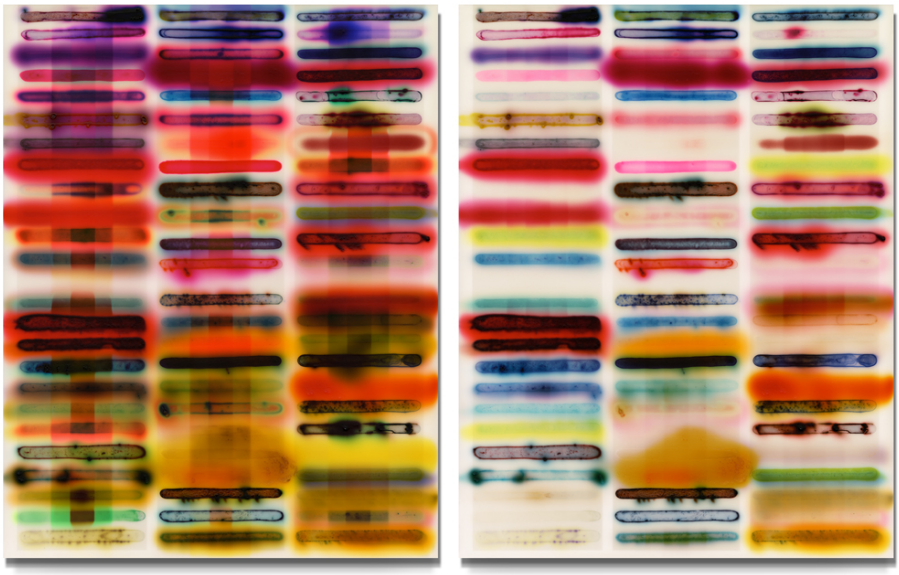
"I feel weird saying it, but in the core of my being, I believe it," Geminder says. "I know it can happen."

* Joe Dworetzky is a second career journalist reporting for the Bay City News Foundation and Local News Matters after a 35-year career as a lawyer in Philadelphia. He can be reached at joe.dworetzky@baycitynews.com.

SQUARECYLINDER.com
northern california art

# David M. Roth on Jaq Chartier

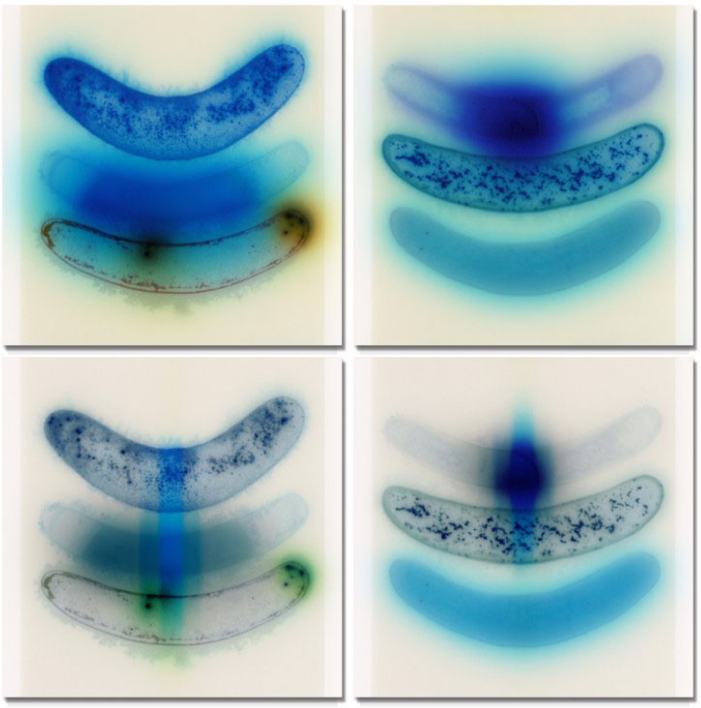
**MAY 17, 2021**
**by David M. Roth**



SunTest #16 (Day 9 & 131), 2020 | Edition of 3 | Time-based image capture; dye sublimation on aluminum | 42 x 68 inches

Jaq Chartier has built an enviable career navigating the gulf between the temporal and the permanent. Employing scientific rigor and visual pleasure-seeking in roughly equal measure, the artist hit her stride in the late 1990s with a series called *Testing* — experiments, essentially, in which she measured the stability of water-soluble inks, dyes and stains. Those deemed archival wound up on wood panels as daubs, dashes, circles and fuzzy stains that resembled luminescent bacteria growing in petri dishes. Colors that exhibited too much volatility got shelved, along with all the pertinent research data.

Recently, the Seattle artist reversed course by revisiting the “fugitive” colors she previously set aside. She blended them with “light-fast/permanent” colors to create hybrid formulations which, when committed to panels and subjected to light, deteriorated at different speeds, producing hues she couldn’t anticipate. By scanning the results at intervals ranging from hours to months and digitally enlarging them well beyond their original notebook-sized dimensions, the artist creates lasting records of the precise changes each group of stains undergoes. The supersaturated (and sometimes very faded) results on view in *Under the Sun*, her current exhibition at Dolby Chadwick Gallery, rank among the most exciting retinal experiences this side of James Turrell.

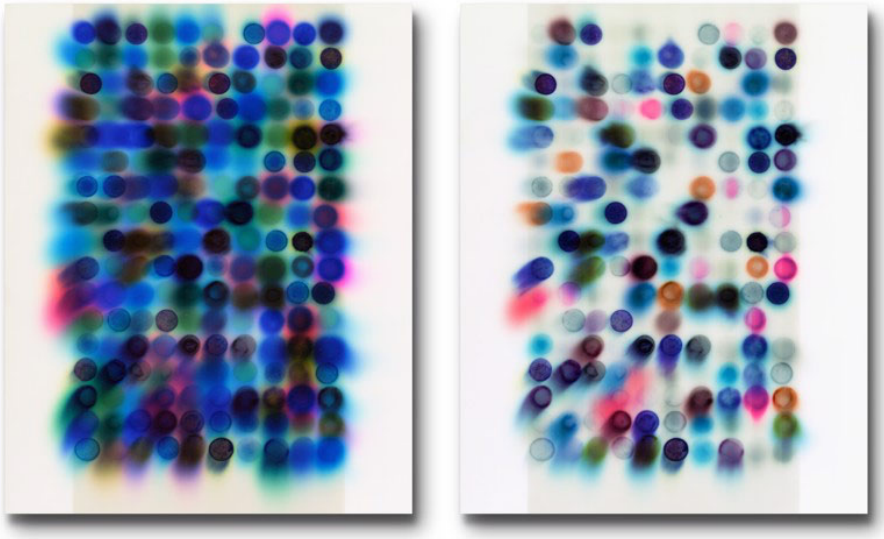


**Day 1 and Day 10 (Blues), 2021, time-based image capture, dye sublimation on aluminum, 50 x 50 inches**

Rendered as dye-sublimation prints on aluminum panels and displayed side-by-side, these time-based, editioned works are composed of loose grids that change over time in ways familiar and surprising. Reds, for example, fade pretty much as you'd expect, whereas blues and purples – depending on what colors the artist adds — break apart and blend to create still other colors. Sometimes they combine to form recognizable shapes, like the Saturn-esque rings seen in *SunTest #9*, a four-panel work that encompasses deteriorating stains recorded at intervals spanning 25 days.

Overall, Chartier's work resists, but never entirely defeats, the impulse to free associate. Nevertheless, the artist strives for – and mostly achieves — the constructivist goal of non-objectivity: an art free of real-world referents. In so doing, her works invite us to contemplate the core structure of color rather than, say, the relationships between colors as Joseph Albers' paintings do. The process exhibits a unique dialectical character.

It begins with an overall chromatic impression registered by whatever colors dominate a particular grouping. Next come macro views where the eye leaps back and forth between early and late-stage images, charting not only color shifts but certain artifacts that become visible en route. The latter range from fiery penumbral rings to plaid columns to diffuse clouds – things that would not be visible had the artist not used a scanner to freeze and magnify the "action." In *Day 1 and Day 10 (Blues)*, for example, banana-shaped stains enlarged well beyond their original size show pigment shattering into discernable



**SunTest #10 (Day 1 & 38), 2020, time-based image capture, dye sublimation on aluminum metal print 20 x 34 inches**

"islands." Mostly what we experience, though, is the intensity of the colors. The strongest examples are *SunTest #16*, a retina-tingling display dominated by reds that, over 131 days, morph into both lighter and darker hues, and *SunTest #10*. In the latter, columns of blurry circles appear to be flying toward you at high speed — an effect I can only liken to a dolly zoom shot of a paintball fight.

Chartier explained she has no scientific training beyond what she learned working a freelance gig with Golden Artist Colors. There, she undertook an "in-depth study of acrylic archival painting practices" to give lecture demonstrations that translated a lot of technical information "into language artists could understand and put to practical use." To illustrate, she created "mini paintings" that demonstrated the behavior of various paints. "I was endlessly curious about all the materials for my students as well as for myself and made lots of extra mini-tests to answer my own questions. At the same time, I was groping around in my studio, painting grid-based organic abstractions and gathering sciency images of stuff like DNA electrophoresis. At some point, all of these things merged in my mind and I started seeing the mini-tests as actual paintings. My mantra became: 'The real painting is the one that isn't a painting' — which really opened things up."

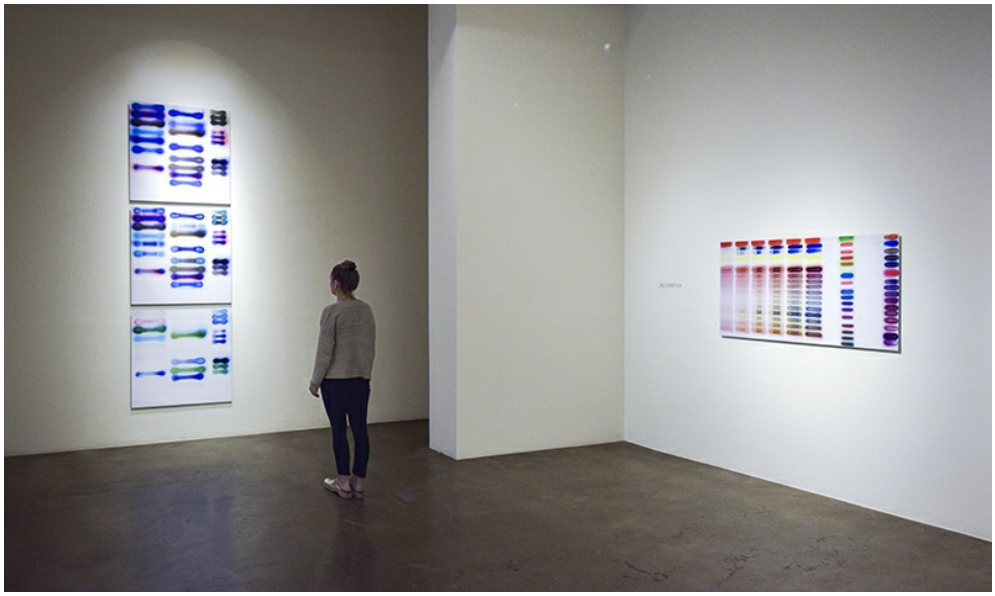
# # #

*Jaq Chartier: "Under the Sun" @* ***Dolby Chadwick Gallery*** *through May 29, 2021*.

**About the author**:
David M. Roth is the editor and publisher of Squarecylinder.

# The Scientific and Creative Process of Artist Jaq





Jaq Chartier's work on display at Robischon Gallery.

## For artist Jaq Chartier, art was always what she loved doing as opposed to what was practical.

But, that didn't stop her from pursuing the arts. It made her even more determined to make it work.

Jaq Chartier's painting practice has landed her work in the collections of Microsoft, The Allen Institute, the Progressive Art Collection, Charles Schwab, as well as on the show, "Billions". She also co-hosted the art fair Aqua Art Miami concurrent with Art Basel.

Chartier's paintings are a cross between scientific and creative processes, found through continually testing of materials and experimentation.

Inspired in part by images of DNA gel electrophoresis, Chartier explores the interaction of different materials like spray paint, mediums and gessos. The result is a spectrum of resembles small, colorful Petri dishes arranged in a grid of saturated, bold lines—another reference to the XY coordinates of a DNA gel electrophoresis readout.

We caught up with her to talk about how she got started, how she got to where she is now, and what she discovered along the way about her creative process while building an art career.

## How did you get started in the arts? Did you have someone to encourage your path?

My mom was a single parent, my parents got divorced when we were pretty young. She had always wanted to be an artist herself, but had been thwarted by her parents who sent her to business school; art school wasn't practical. She went to school near RISD and was always wistful about it, so when I showed interest, she was encouraging.

In eighth grade, they moved the town library into a boring brick building. They had a contest for someone to do a commemorative painting of the library, and there was a $100 scholarship attached. And I decided to do it, but it was kind of last minute. So my mom let me take three days off of school to do this painting—which was a pretty big deal because I was a good student and school was really

important to my mom.

So there was a message in there that this was important, more important than even going to school. And then I won the contest, and there was the $100 scholarship attached—which meant I had to go to art school to redeem it. So it set me on this path that this is what I was going to do. It gave me a great foundation, one you don't normally get in a small town.

> **She took it really seriously. She knew what it was like to have that passion crushed in her.**
>
> **When I showed interest, she didn't do anything at all to discourage me. She almost overcompensated and encouraged me more than probably most parents would have.**

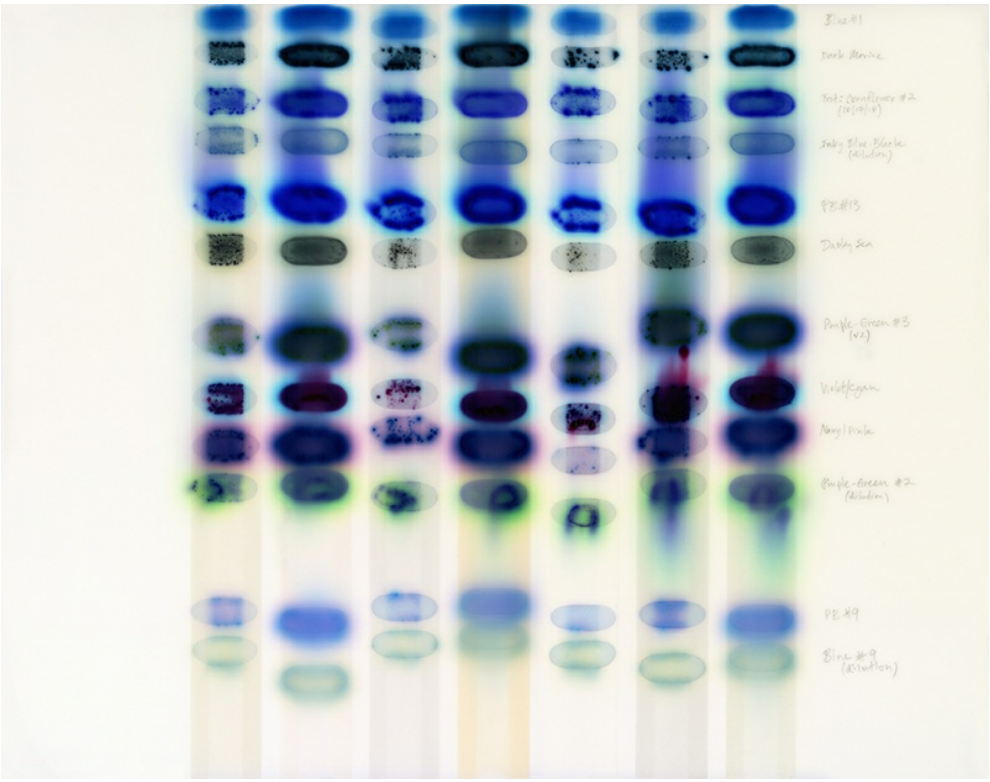
We were poor, and the idea of going to art school was kind of dumb in a way, not the practical choice to make a living. But there was nobody in my family who had gone to college before me, so no one was trying to talk me out of it. If they had, someone might have been saying go to law school or go to med school. I mean, I could have, I had the grades. But art was given this supreme importance by my mom. It made it easier to go with the flow of that because that's what I loved doing as opposed to what was practical.

## How did you decide to turn this passion into a career that supports you?

Making a living has never been an easy thing, it's taken a long time. If it was about making a living, this is not the path I would have chosen. I'm doing better now, but for many years I didn't.

As soon as I decided to be a painter, I decided I didn't want student loans.

I didn't want student loans because immediately I was thinking this is not a way I'm going to make money—so I don't want student loans to force me into getting a real job to pay back the loans. And so at that point, it was stripping things down into 'what's the simplest lifestyle so you can actually be a painter'?



Jaq Chartier, *7 Lanes Blues*

## Your work has a strong science aspect to it. Tell us a little more about how that developed.

To begin, I always gather source material—images I'm attracted to, things I like to look at, and at a certain point after grad school, I was really into an organic abstraction kind of mode. I didn't rhave a plan that was encompassing a whole body of work, just one thing leading to the next, just sort of groping.

I was teaching a basic drawing class for non-art majors at the University of Washington, talking about source material, and since they were all non-art majors they were studying a whole bunch of different things. To get across the idea of source material, I was saying how I had just seen the OJ Simpson trial on TV, and there were images of DNA electrophoresis.

I didn't even know what it was called, I just was describing it. One of the students pops up and goes "well I'm studying electrophoresis—I think that's what you mean—and I have this image." She pulls it out of her notebook and said "here, is this what you mean?" I said yes and that I want to start looking for images like that because that's where my interest lies and she said, "well you can have this one." So that launched me into gathering images of DNA electrophoresis.

## What was so attractive about electrophoresis images to you?

There was something about those images, they were organic abstraction in their own way. Then I was teaching for Golden Acrylics a few years later, and I was doing a lot of testing of the materials for Golden. And one of the things they train us to do is take all this technical information and we translate it for artists and we teach artists how to use materials.

There are paints, gessos, and mediums—lots of materials—and each one interacts differently. There's a lot of trial and error. I would make what we called "demo boards" where we would show students illustrations of how materials work. Some of the boards would explore one coat of a particular ground versus two coats versus three coats, etcetera, set up in a grid layout. When I stepped back and looked at these boards, they were similar to the paintings I was making in my studio — but more interesting.

The demo boards also brought in this idea of testing, and I started to see them as paintings. And the DNA thing locked into place because DNA electrophoresis images are an XY coordinated grid with a test going on, and everything has a meaning. So everything fell into place — the three things: what I was doing in the studio already, the DNA imagery, and the testing for Golden all came together in this weird way and launched this new body of work called "Testing."

## What was that body of work, "Testing" about?

At first, it was all about different kinds of materials, but at a certain point, I discovered by accident that when I had water-based, water-soluble ink underneath other layers, it started bleeding up in interesting ways. I honed in from there on just working and experimenting with ink.

Once I moved into the area of exploring ink, I played with burying ink under things like spray paint and gesso and seeing what it would do and how it would migrate and bleed out. All of that exploration merged with the organic abstraction I had been doing.

At that point, it became a new body of work where each experiment would suggest the next thing.

After years of groping as an abstract painter — where I was trying to figure out everything about painting in each painting — this new way of working broke things down into simple experiments that I could get my mind around. One thing would lead to another, and there was ongoing work. As long as I was curious then there was something to do.

I pretty quickly came up with rules and boundaries for certain things I can and can't use, because it has to be a real test. I don't even know where that idea came from, exactly. It's just that once I saw it, for me it made sense. It has to be a real test, rule number one. Everything in there has to support the test in some way. If I coat the whole thing with a beautiful red glaze, it might look cool, but then I can't read the test. If I can't read the test it doesn't help me move forward.

They were pretty simple tests at first. By scientific standards they were not even scientific—like one coat of spray paint versus two coats of spray paint … does it make a difference? Simple.

And, of course, I'm doing this all by hand, not actually measuring specific amounts of spray paint. So a scientist would say there are no real controls for this. But it was good enough for me. Anytime something happened and I didn't understand why it happened, that would lead to another test.

The evolution of it is following the questions and my curiosity.

It's funny because there's this whole thing about DNA and human evolution, but I'm also looking at it as a metaphor for science and the idea of wonder and exploration. There's also the concept of evolution even in the paintings. I'll look at them sometimes and think, "Why do some things keep repeating in the work, and why do other things become dead ends?" It has to survive in the climate of the studio and climate of the gallery system, and yet persist enough to make me interested. It's interesting to me what survives my own natural selection process and what doesn't.


A Peek inside Jaq Chartier's studio and testing materials.

## Do you view your work more as a scientific process or creative process?

It's really all about creativity and the creative process, which has always really interested me and there are lots of metaphors out there. There's a really great book I've stumbled across called Fire in the Crucible: The Alchemy of Creative Genius by John Briggs. I keep finding copies on Amazon for a dollar and giving them away to friends. It goes through the whole creative process but talks about different types of creative people—artists, scientists, writers, etc. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of creativity, for example, the dichotomies of how artists feel introverted and extroverted, lazy and really ambitious. We have all these contrary aspects of how we are as people.

> *He talks about how creative people can hold opposing ideas in their minds without feeling like they have to make a black and white decision. Creativity is really about staying in this in-between place where you aren't deciding something and then that's it, you stop thinking.*

It's playing around in the gray area—that's where you discover things. That's where you find something, where nobody else has looked as closely.

Not everybody is cut out for that. A lot of people like a simple answer, yes or no. Then they can move on to the next thing. It's uncomfortable to hold two opposing ideas in your mind at the same time and not pick one. But artists for some reason seem to like it.

I think anybody who is working in a creative way has that, and maybe it's partly what fuels the work, the moving back and forth between the two sides. You're moving, you're not static.

There are different types of scientists. Some are purely research-driven and they're just exploring, open-ended. There are also some that are doing a job with a goal in mind.

## How does this hybrid of a creative and scientific approach to your work change how you view the process as art with a capital "A" or craft.

There's a lot of craft in what I do in my studio and I'm also really aware of the differences.

In the craft part, I'm trying to perfect a technique so that it's always predictable and gets me where I want to go in a clean simple way.

The creative artistic part of it has to be open-ended. There has to be room for me in the moment to change my mind or try something different.

> *Both things are happening in the studio all the time. It has to be in balance, or the craft can take over so much that it shuts down the exploration process.*

But there's a lot of craft in anything. Any painting that's being made has a ton of craft in it.

There's this whole theory that you shouldn't get too good at something, but to me, that's like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There's nothing wrong with the craft. That's what makes you a master at something. You're developing a skill no one else has at this particular thing. Why would you want to throw that out, it's your thing? You've created it.

And then you have the ability to improvise in that realm. Not getting too good at anything, it's an easy answer for how to make trendy art, but it's not good long-term. It's good for a sprint, not a marathon. Plus it undermines the reason most people get into art in the first place.

My theory is that people get into art because they want to make something beautiful—and then the first thing the art world tells you is maybe that's a bad thing.

## Where do you stand on the whole art vs. craft debate?

Not mastering your craft works for people whose creative process is about an idea. They are just trying to find the right material for that particular moment.

In that case, you don't really need to become the master, you can hire someone to do the mastery for you. But not everybody is a conceptual artist. Not everybody is working from that point of view. It's a relatively contemporary idea that it's about the idea and not the object.

There are a ton of people like me who are really interested in the object and making things that are about beauty. We approach making art from what we want to see and then figure out where it lands in the world after the fact—instead of figuring out what the art world is going to put in a museum and then trying to make that.

The beauty of the art world today is that you can do any of it. Whatever type of creativity is in your mind, you can find a way to make it. There's an audience for everything. And, you don't even have to physically make everything yourself.

## Let's move on to some business questions. How has your role as an art fair organizer changed your relationship with your art dealers?

Because of the art fair, I had this really obvious shift where I realized that art dealers are people—which of course they are. But before, I saw them in almost a parental way. They're the parent, you're the child. So there's this sort of sense that you're in this power struggle with them. For some artists, they're trying to please their art dealer while some artists are trying to rebel against their art dealer.

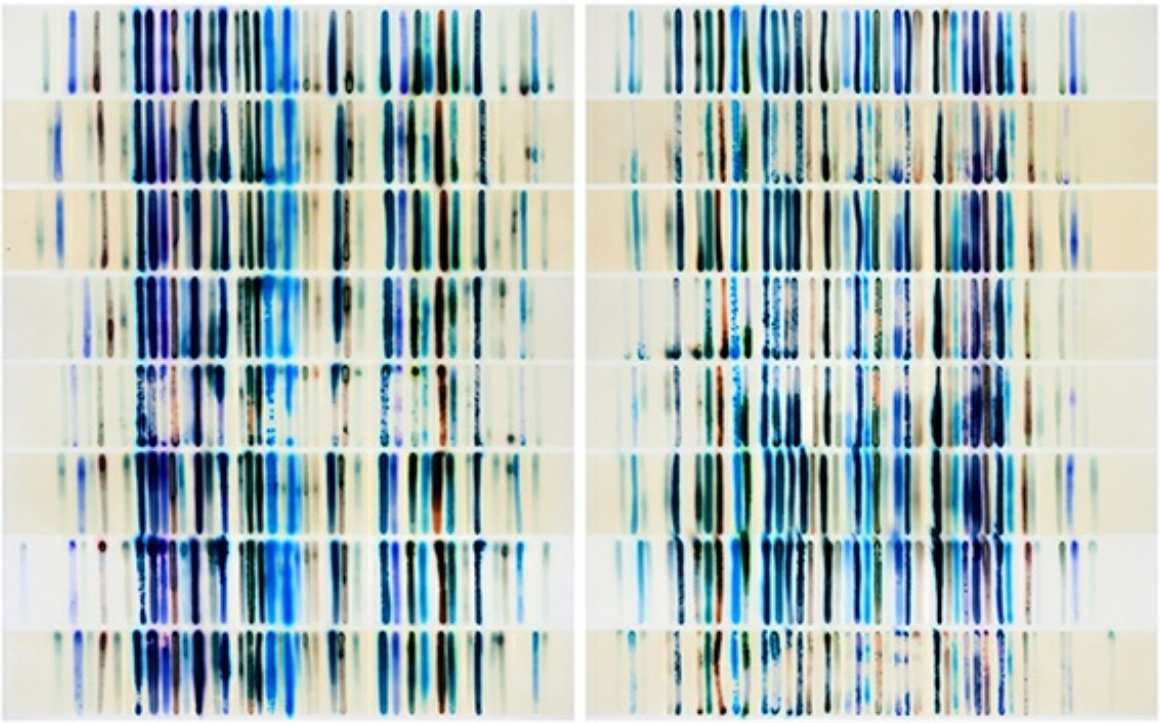
I think that's where a lot of artists get into trouble, they stay in that mode even when they're long into adult years. Artists sometimes use an art dealer in ways that they would never treat any other person. Like, you get what you can and then you take off. If you get a show and then a better opportunity comes along, you ditch your dealer, often in a rude way. I think it's a very short-sighted way of handling the art dealer relationship because you're not realizing that the art world is a small place.

Everybody talks about everything. So if an artist gets a reputation as being a user or irresponsible or not respectful, that gets around and you burn a number of bridges and then you're done.

# Jaq Chartier @ Dolby Chadwick

squarecylinder.com/2018/05/jaq-chartier-dolby-chadwich

**by Barbara Morris**



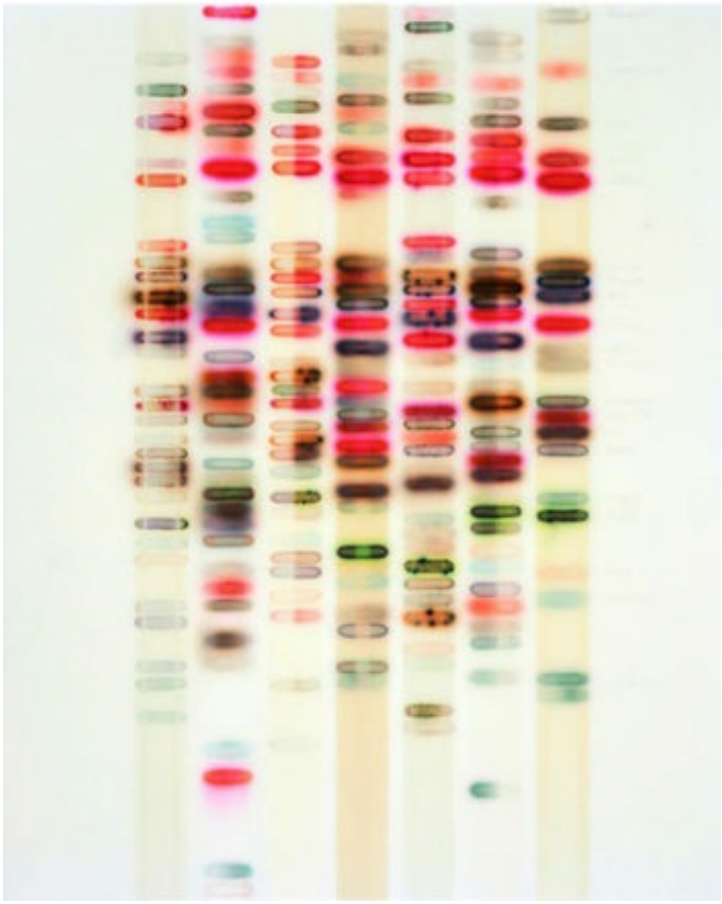
Blues Chart with 8 Whites, 2018, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 50 x 81 inches

Art and science have long enjoyed an intertwined history, with artist's materials often just a heartbeat removed from the chemistry set.  And while highly toxic art supplies (solvents, thinners, etching acids) have largely fallen out of favor, the options available to artists seeking new frontiers haven't exactly narrowed — if anything, they've broadened.  For proof one need only take in the work of Jaq Chartier, a Seattle artist whose current show, *In Solution*, runs through June 2.

For the past 20 years she's carefully researched how inks, dyes, spray paints and resins interact with a variety of substrates.  The epiphany that set her on this course of experimentation came when she realized, while working for a fine-art paint company, that color-test diagrams could, in fact, *be* works of art.  Today, Chartier uses an eyedropper to apply the above-mentioned liquids to carefully prepared grounds.  She coats them with layers of white

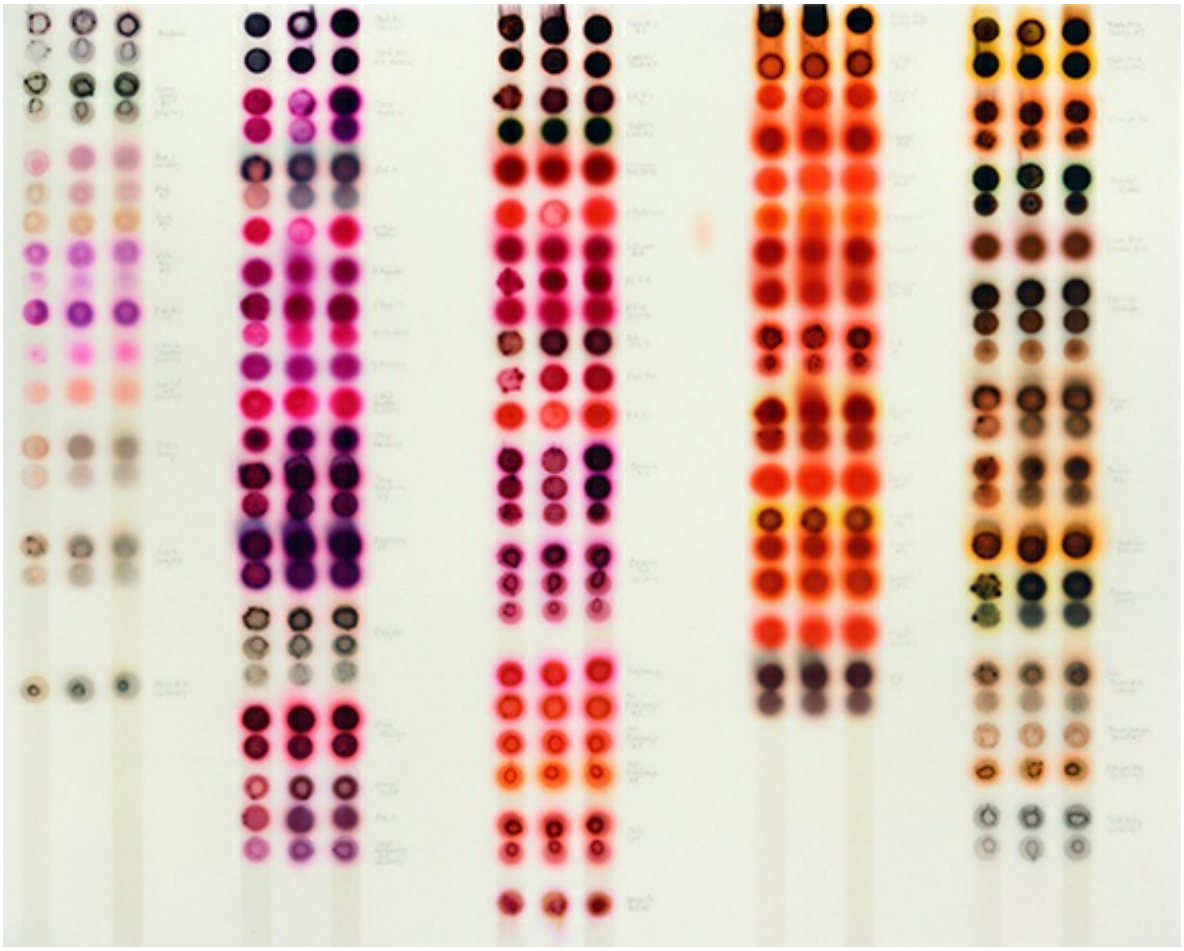
spray paint and resins and then waits for the emergence of the obscured colors, which appear as fuzzy, elongated oval-shaped stains or dyes bleeding through to the surface.  Chartier orchestrates compositions in linear arrangements that share the visual

characteristics of DNA gel electrophoresis, the laboratory process in which electric current is used to separate the elements of DNA samples according to their molecular weight.
For *Blues Chart with 8 Whites*, a large diptych, Chartier divided each panel into eight horizontal bands with narrow, lozenge-shaped marks following the same pattern in each row. A vibrant, electric blue anchors the left image, in effect forming a stripe down the center. That hue repeats on the right, but is dispersed. On the side of the panel she scrawls faint annotations in pencil: “Kvy maxx Br. Wh. Sat.,” “Rust heat,” “Kxycm51502” – indicators of the meticulous research undergirding her practice. In this, one senses the strong influence of Joseph Albers who conducted similar color experiments, albeit with notations placed on the versos of his paintings.



Pink/Orange (7 Lanes), 2018, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 30 x 24 inches

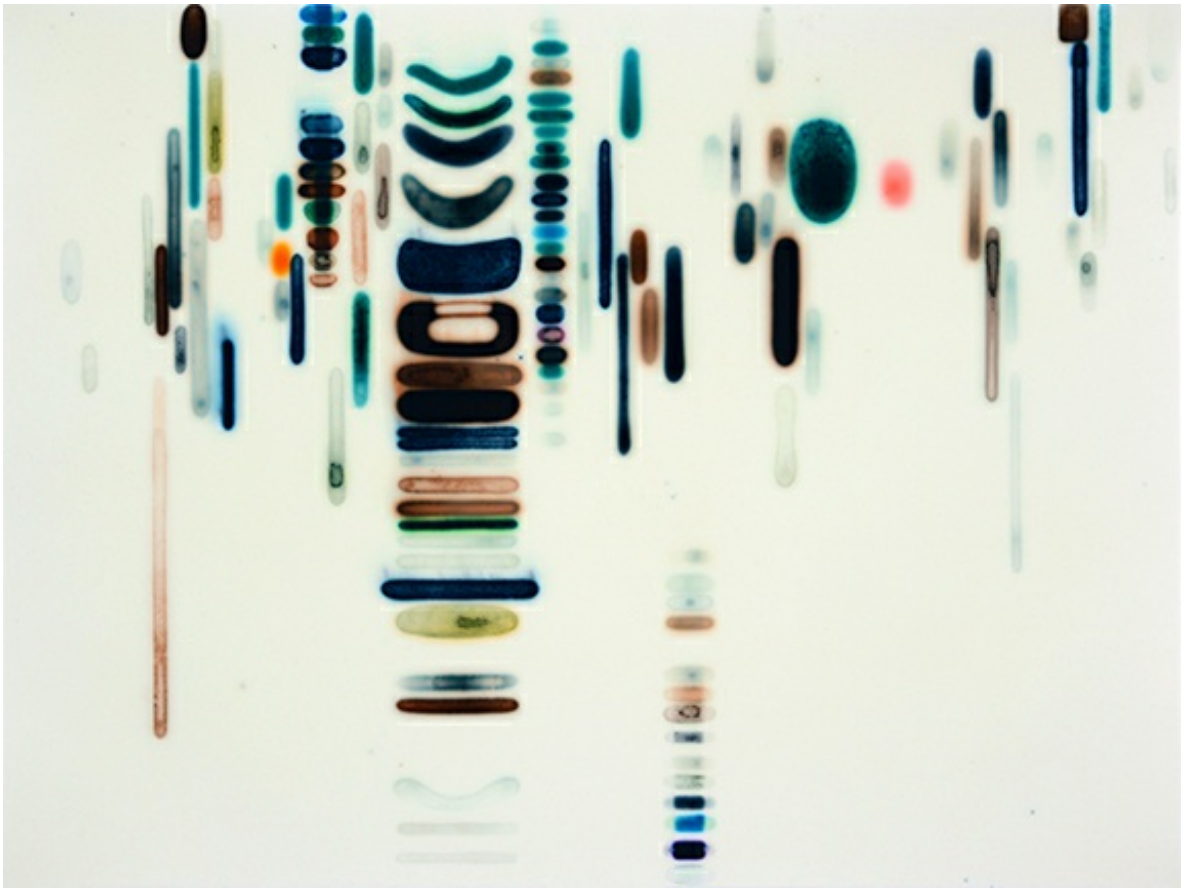
The shapes that comprise *BG/Brown*float like shards of a mobile. They suggest chemistry and scientific inquiry, but just as insistently call to mind totemic markings. *Winter Chart (15 Whites)* is a medium-scaled diptych, and a particularly satisfying work, in warm hues—magentas, oranges, pinks and violets—juxtaposed with flickering bright greens and blues; a full, gem-like spectrum of color activates this work while paler, earth-toned shapes interject a muted, slightly figurative note. The irregularity and faint quirkiness of it all fire the imagination.



Violet~Red~Brown, 2018, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 24 x 30 inches

*Violet~Red~Brown*, consisting of five vertical columns, each comprised of three rows of dots, carry annotations such as "Orange/BG(dilution)," "Test Gray (12/7/17)," "Plum/Flamingo." The individual spots generally have a central core, a ring of more concentrated pigment, surrounded by a halo of color that becomes more diffuse, feathering out until it blends seamlessly into the ground. The most intense spots, however, have a broader, more uniform core. As you try to bring them into focus, shimmering after-images, possibly the effects of complimentary colors, appear. The intense hues, coupled with the challenge of trying to pull the shapes into focus, make for an optical workout.

With its grid structure, Chartier's work relates to a broad spectrum of geometric abstraction and Minimalism. The subtle, poetic squares of Agnes Martin, the stripes of painters like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland and the resin-based painting of Markus Linnenbrink all spring to mind. The lack of a quantifiable goal ultimately subverts the scientific air of the project. What you see is instead a purely visual investigation into the behavior of specific, individually selected materials as they are subjected to a sequence of physical and chemical manipulations.



BG/Brown, 2018, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 30 x 40 inches

Chartier's unassuming marks act as the protagonists of an abstracted narrative and exhibit as much rigor and evocative force as other artists' more overtly assertive forms or gestures. Laying them down as she does, Chartier, like a 21st century necromancer, resurrects the dormant ability of the shaman and the alchemist, holding us spellbound with her carefully crafted "stories" and volatile "potions."

# # #

*Jaq Chartier: In Solution @ Dolby Chadwick Gallery through June 2, 2018.*

**About the author:**

Barbara Morris is a Bay Area-based writer and artist. She is a regular contributor to *Artillery*. She was a contributor to *Art Ltd*. for seven years and previously wrote for *Artweek* for ten years, seven of them as a contributing editor. Her writing has appeared in *WEAD*, *stretcher.org*, and *Artist's Dialogue*, as well as numerous other publications. Morris holds an MFA from UC Berkeley.

Medium

# Chance and Chaos: In the Studio with Jaq Chartier

medium.com/@seattleartfair/chance-and-chaos-in-the-studio-with-jaq-chartier-89d974cfbf37

August 1, 2017

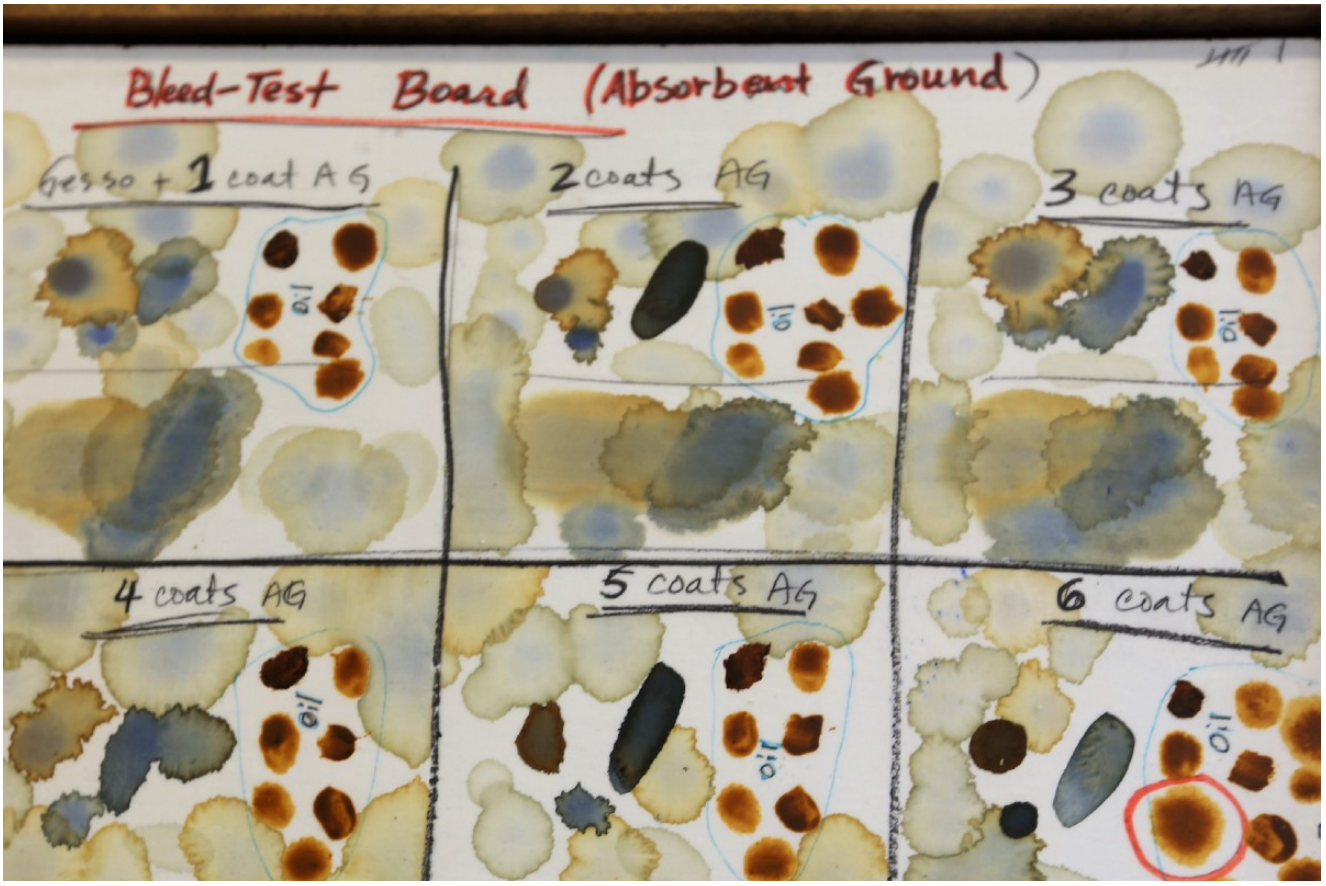
A glimpse into Seattle Art Fair Host Committee member and featured artist, Jaq Chartier's world of experimentation

Jaq Chartier varnishes a painting she is preparing for Seattle Art Fair. Her main body of work explores testing mixtures of inks, dyes and stains.

As Jaq Chartier pulls drops of ink across a white wood panel, she creates shapes that resemble strands of DNA. She repeats this motion, switching glass eye droppers, over and over until the board is covered. The end product, to Chartier, becomes a chart.

At an intersection of art and science, the Seattle artist studies the chemistry of inks, dyes and stains.

"I'm not interested in painting about something else," she said. "I'm interested in the materials. To keep myself interested I have to be learning all the time."




One of Chartier's original sample charts.

Chartier's testing process ultimately derived from a teaching experience, though. While freelancing as a technical instructor for Golden Artist Colors, artists often asked questions about how to use materials, she said. So, Chartier compiled sample boards, testing the products under a selection of variables.

One of her first "bleed-test boards" still hangs on the wall of her studio — a testament to the evolution of her work.

"I keep it around because it's so rough," she said. "Everything about it is not self-conscious at all, it wasn't trying to be a painting. So, I keep that in mind. The real painting is the one that isn't really a painting."



Chartier's studio contains hundreds of small bottles of mixed inks. She tests and labels each accordingly.

Chartier works by this mantra consistently. Each painting features hundreds of blurbs of color, affected distinctively, as they originated from an unique homemade formula.

While traditional, archival materials ensure stability, the stains the artist creates transform due to a plethora of factors, such as humidity, time and light. In order to pinpoint the source the alteration, she tests the mixtures on a panel — drawing extended oval shapes in linear columns, like gel electrophoresis, or something inside a petri dish.

After covering the surface in a vibrant assortment of inks, she coats the panel in a variety of white spray paints — each impacting the inks differently. This step resembles a Polaroid photo coming to life — developing from light into color, she said. The resin buries essentially all imagery on the panel, and over a few days, color rises to the surface, some more so than others.

“I have to be able to work with a certain amount of chance and chaos,” Chartier said. “If it did exactly what I thought, I’d be bored. I really like that element of experimentation and risk.”

But, not every aspect of the painting comes with risk. Chartier labels each ink, row by row. She pencils in notes on the sides of a piece, as well as inside a sketchbook, where she draws a mini color-coded replica of the painting.

While the paintings may never truly be finished in the artist’s mind, viewers will witness the tests in action at Seattle Art Fair with Woodside Braseth Gallery. A veteran of the fair, Chartier recognizes the impact an event of its capacity can have.

Detailed notes for one of Chartier's paintings.

She advocates for artists as a member of the Seattle Art Fair Host Committee, where her efforts go toward integrating local artists outside of the realm of the fair — those who are equally as worthy of attention, she said.

Chartier is practiced in these determinations. As a response to Art Basel in Miami, Chartier pioneered the Aqua Fair, which brought West Coast artists to the scene. A fair in Seattle provides similar opportunities for local artists and galleries, she said.

"We need to support local galleries if we want to have a thriving arts scene," she said. "People are here, the money is here, it's just not connecting as well as it could be."

Chartier said she hopes, over time, Seattle Art Fair will be that bridge.

Find Chartier's works with Woodside Braseth Gallery in booth D18.

# About Jaq Chartier

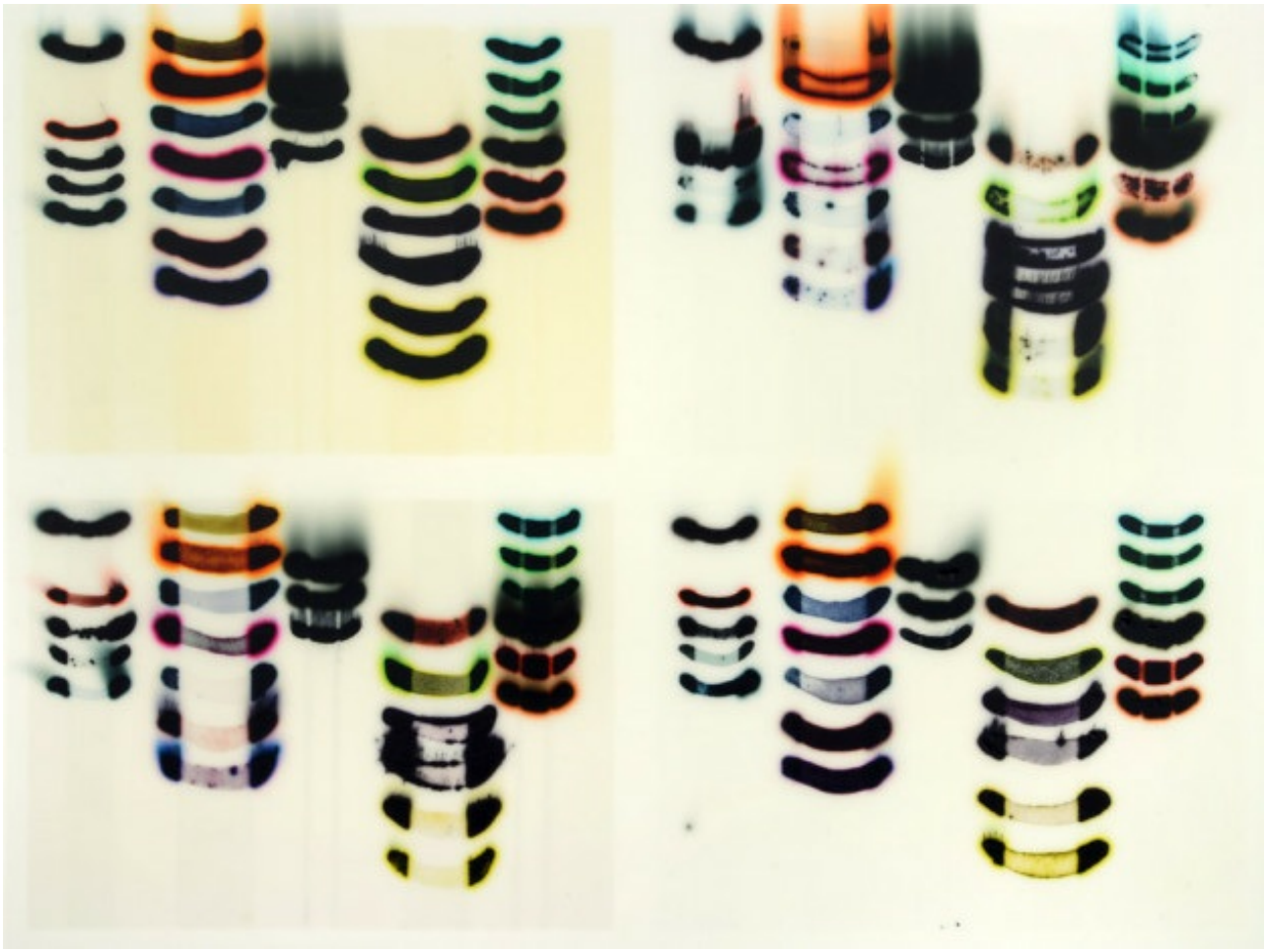
interaliamag.org/articles/jaq-chartier-testing

Jaq Chartier

January 18, 2016

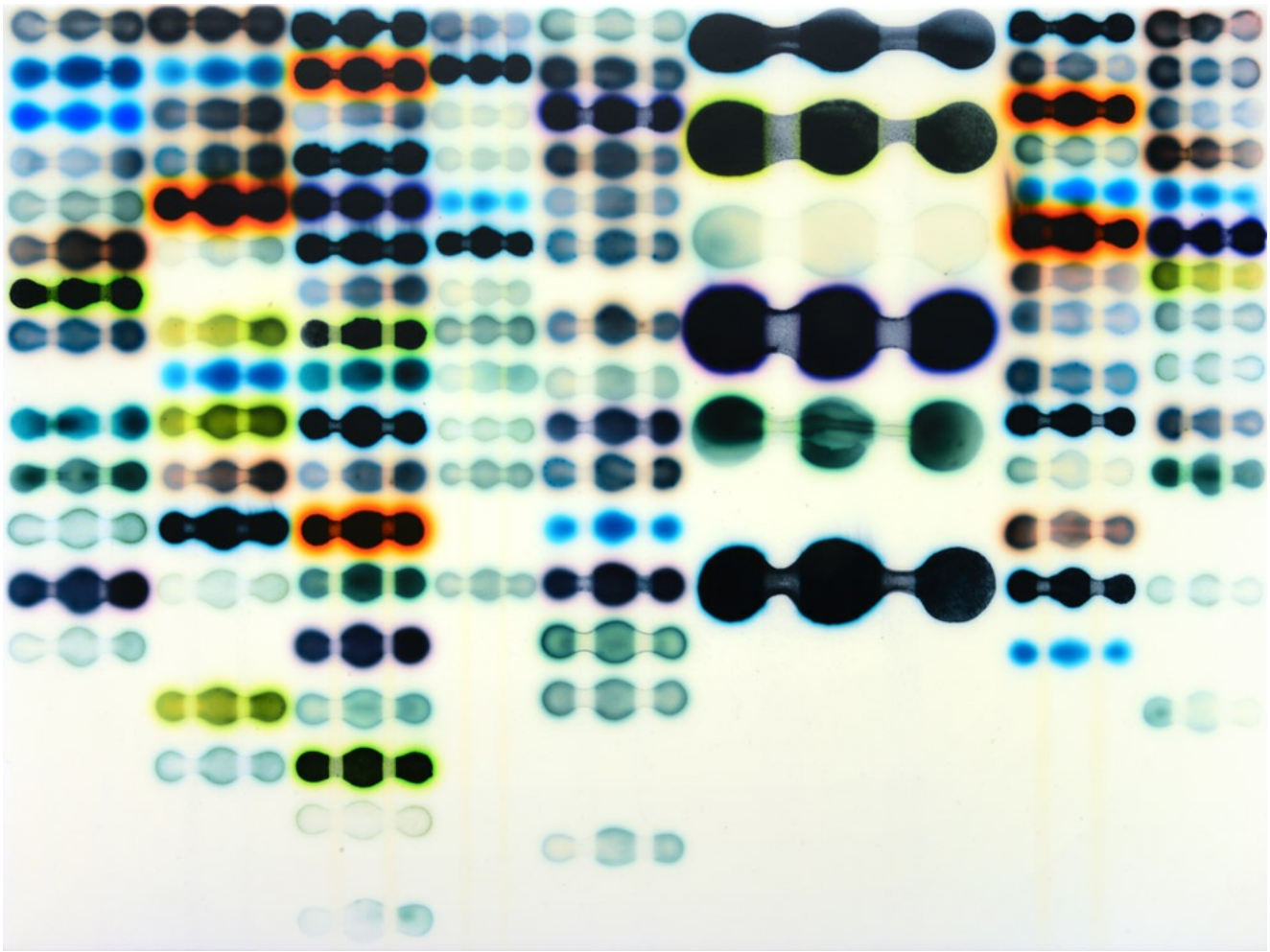
Jaq Chartier: 9 Whites w/Reds & Violets, acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 30 x 40”

I call my primary body of work *Testing*, because each painting begins as an actual test. Inspired by scientific images like gel electrophoresis, they feature intimate views of materials reacting to each other, to light, and the passage of time. Instead of paint, I use my own complex formulas of deeply saturated inks, stains and dyes. Such colors can do things paint can’t do – change, shift, and migrate through other layers of paint, or separate into component parts with differing properties.

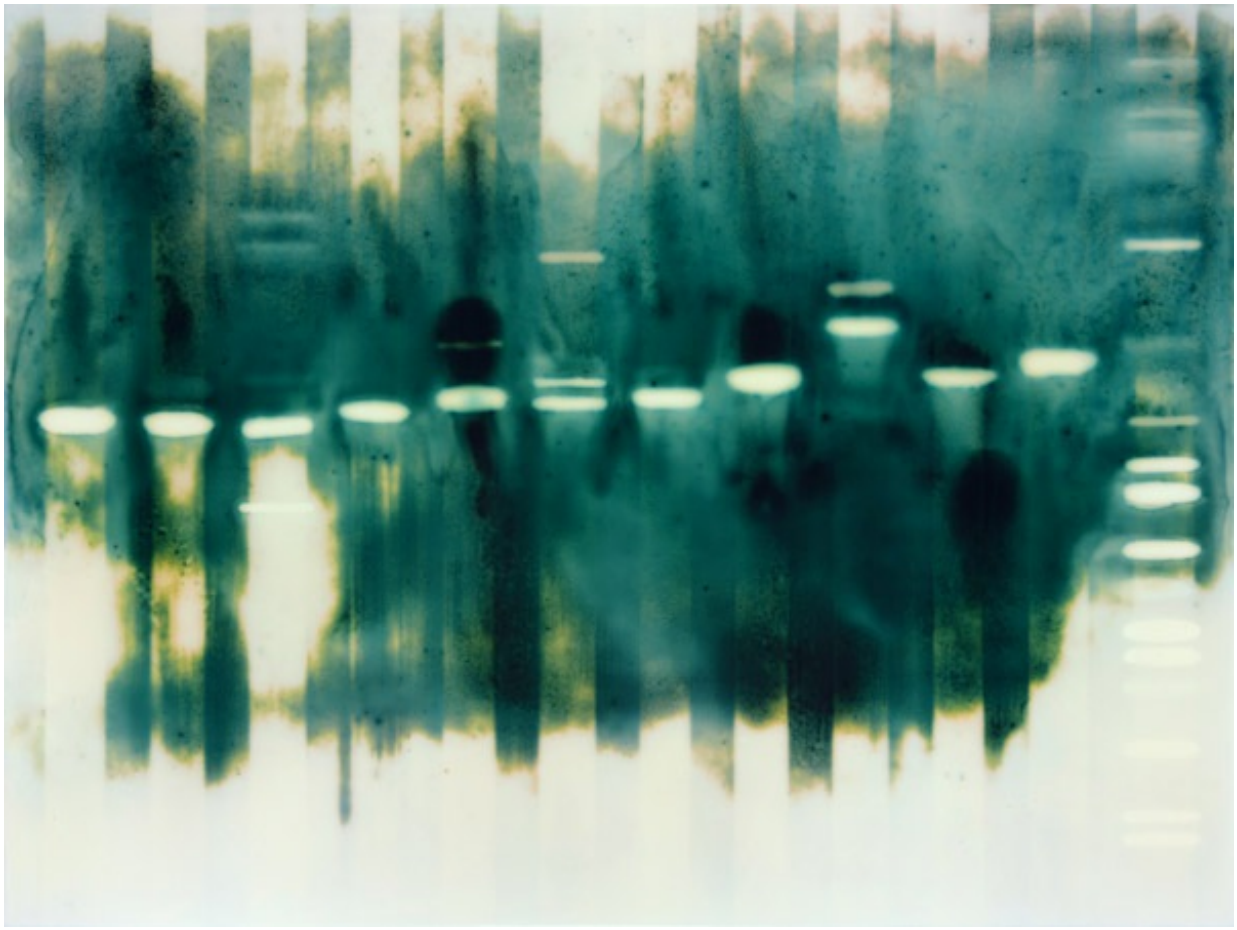


Jaq Chartier: 4 Tests (Blacks) acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 30 x 40”

Whereas traditional artist paints are formulated to be stable and controllable, stains are capricious and easily affected by lots of factors like humidity, gravity, time, UV light – even the structure of molecules in the other elements they touch. After years of study I’m still intrigued by the hidden chemistries of these materials. I write notations directly on the paintings to help me track what’s happening in each test. These notes are one of the physical forms I use to display parallels between scientific and artistic exploration.

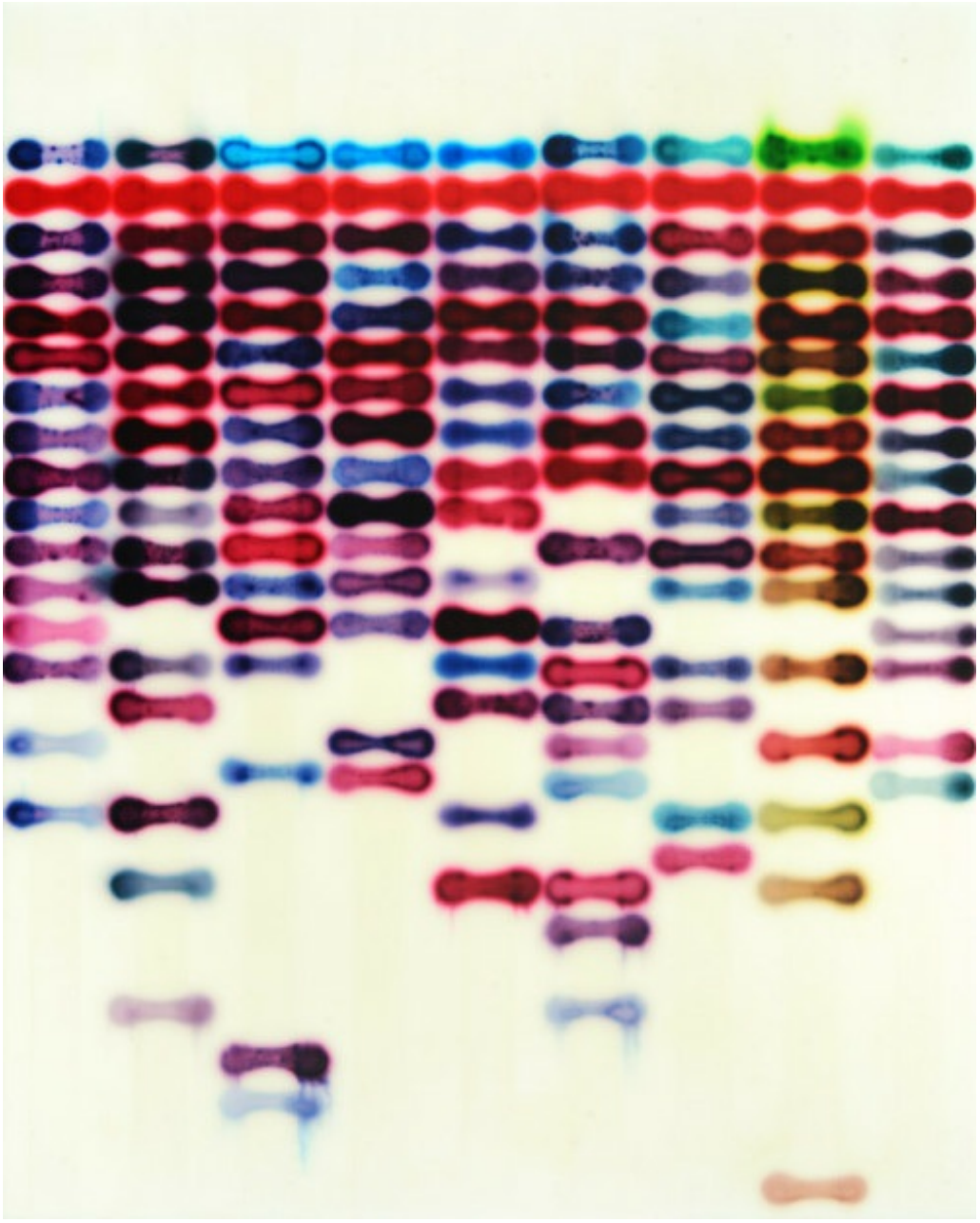


Jaq Chartier: Spring Infusion (S. Black) acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 18 x 24”
Like most painters I was educated to use archival materials and “proper” painting techniques. This practice was the original motivation behind a group of work I call SunTests. They started as a way of sorting out fugitive materials from those that are stable and lightfast. But instead of discarding such materials, I’ve found myself attracted to them, drawn by the additional layer of complexity that such changes suggest, and by the very notion of impermanence.



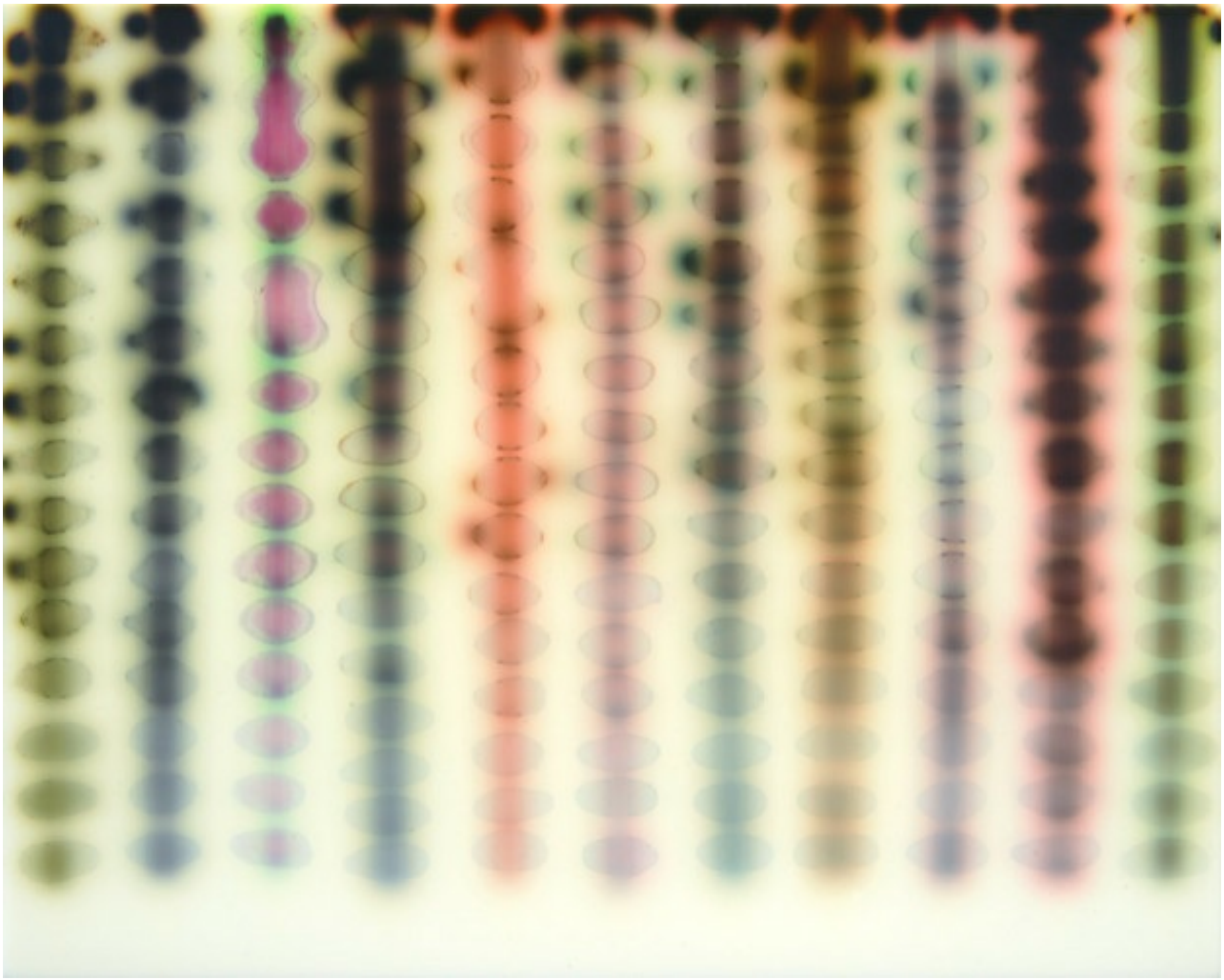
Jaq Chartier: Infusion w/BB1 acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 30 x 40”

Time is not a dimension people usually think of for paintings. Even after you know about the testing process underpinning my work, it’s tempting to view the paintings as static, frozen moments or phenomena captured in the acrylic film like bugs in amber. But they’re actually slow-motion performances changing imperceptibly over time as the materials continue to interact. I design some colors to shift in hue or gradually disappear, while others remain permanent.



Jaq Chartier: 9 Studies (P. FE Red) acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 30 x 24”

Whether the painting is large or small, you’re meant to get up close. The lush matte surface and blurry, out-of-focus quality bring further attention to the effort of looking. Repetition is employed to compare & contrast, and to provide situations where unexpected mutations might occur.



Jaq Chartier, Dilution Test acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel 8 x 10”

.....

**www.jaqbox.com**

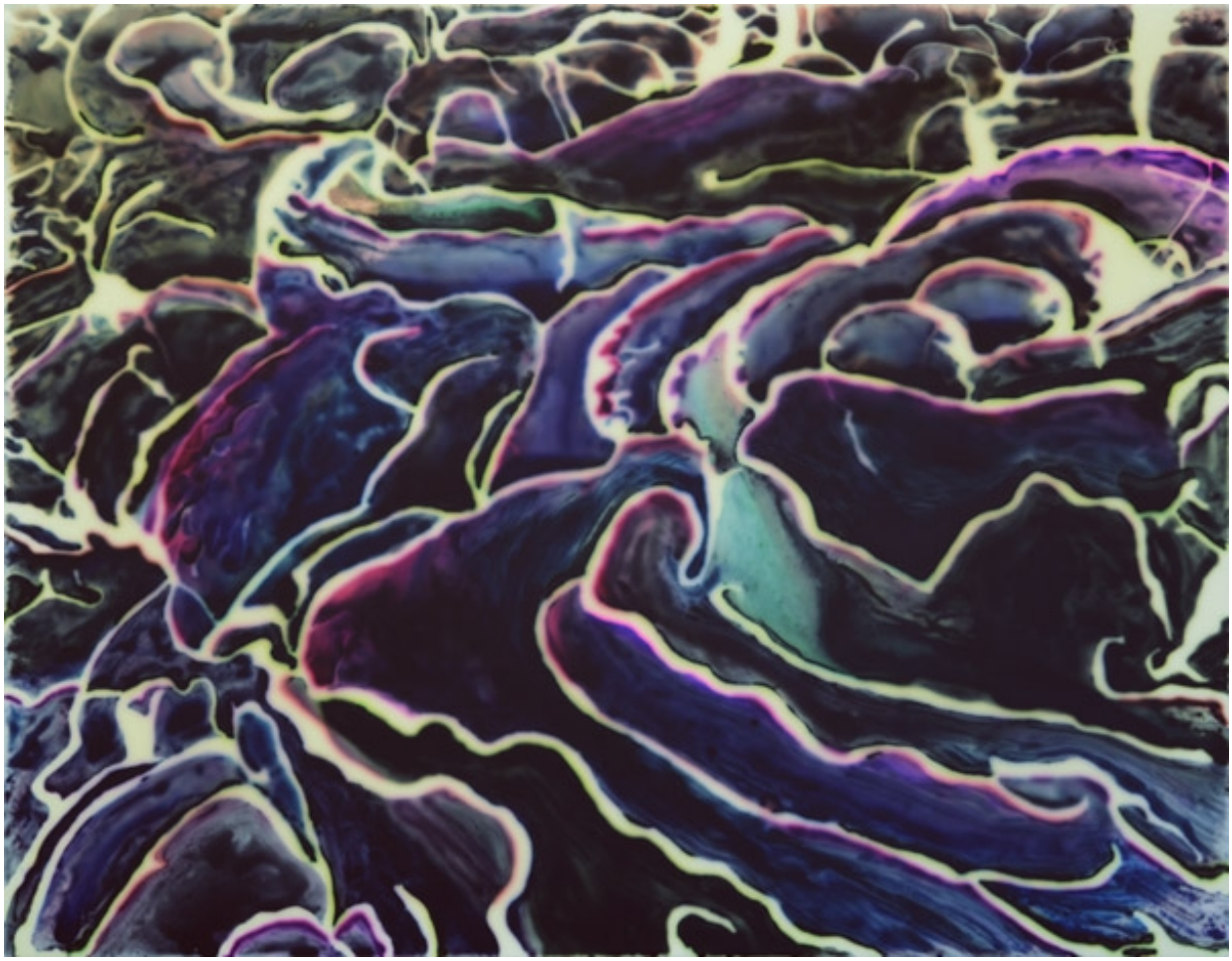
Art, Creativity, Imagination, Science

Jaq Chartier's paintings explore scientific methods through experimentation with paint and process. All of her works are "tests" to discover something about materials and what they do. Inspired in part by images of DNA gel electrophoresis, Chartier investigates the migration of various stains through layers of paint and acrylic gels. Paintings such as, 1 Day vs. 1 Week [2006], Sun Test: 40 Whites [2004-2010], and Dilution Test [2014] – titles that attest to such experimentation – feature intimate views of materials as they react to each other, to light, and the passage of time, including notes written directly on the paintings. Through experimentation, observation and notation Chartier creates sensuous paintings that provide commentary on both the visual culture and everyday practice of scientific investigation by highlighting similarities between artistic and scientific practice. View all posts with Jaq Chartier →

# New American Paintings



Jaq Chartier's (NAP #13, #31, #61) paintings like to pose as objects other than paintings. The Seattle artist and cofounder of Aqua Art Miami is best known for Testing, an ongoing that physically experiments with her materials and processes. Chartier integrates paint with saturated inks, stains and dyes she designs to evolve over time, creating large, hyper-saturated canvases that pulse with patterns and forms that reference the imagery of contemporary science—DNA strands, glass slides, microbodies— and ultimately behave as visual experiments themselves. - *Erin Langner, Seattle Contributor*



*Jaq Chartier | Lettuce Coral, 2013, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 28 x 36 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

A similar consciousness persists in Chartier's newest series *SubOptic*, on view at Seattle's Platform Gallery, for which she reconfigures her processes for more traditional subject matter. Through allusions to cyanotypes of underwater flora by Anna Atkins, an early 19th century British artist and friend of photography pioneer Henry Fox Talbot, Chartier fuses the highly present concern of climate change with the historic sensibilities of scientific

drawings and traditional landscape scenes. Designed to fade over time, *SubOptic* mirrors the fate of both the cyanotype reference points and the bleached corals the works portray, steeping the paintings in a deep sense of temporality. I caught up with the artist to find out more about the new direction for her work and the processes behind it.

**Erin Langner: Both *SubOptic* and Ultra Marine, your show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, OR earlier this year, take inspiration from coral reefs and their destruction due to climate change. Was there a particular incident or experience that instigated your interest in this subject?**

Jaq Chartier: Something clicked when I saw Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth.* It filled me with dread for the magnitude and complexity of the problem of climate change. At the same time, the rich imagery resonated with my "art & science" inclinations. I wanted to explore this imagery in the studio, but I didn't see a way to integrate it with my *Testing* paintings. So it has been a slow-moving side project for a long time. This year, I finally decided to concentrate on the new series, just allowing it to exist as it's own thing, separate from *Testing*, and to see what happened. It didn't take long to realize that the overall topic of climate change was too big to take on all at once. I needed to find an approach that was focused and personal, and that turned out to be the forms and structures of corals.

*Jaq Chartier | Stony Coral Landscape, 2013, acrylic, stains and dyes on wood panel, 11 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

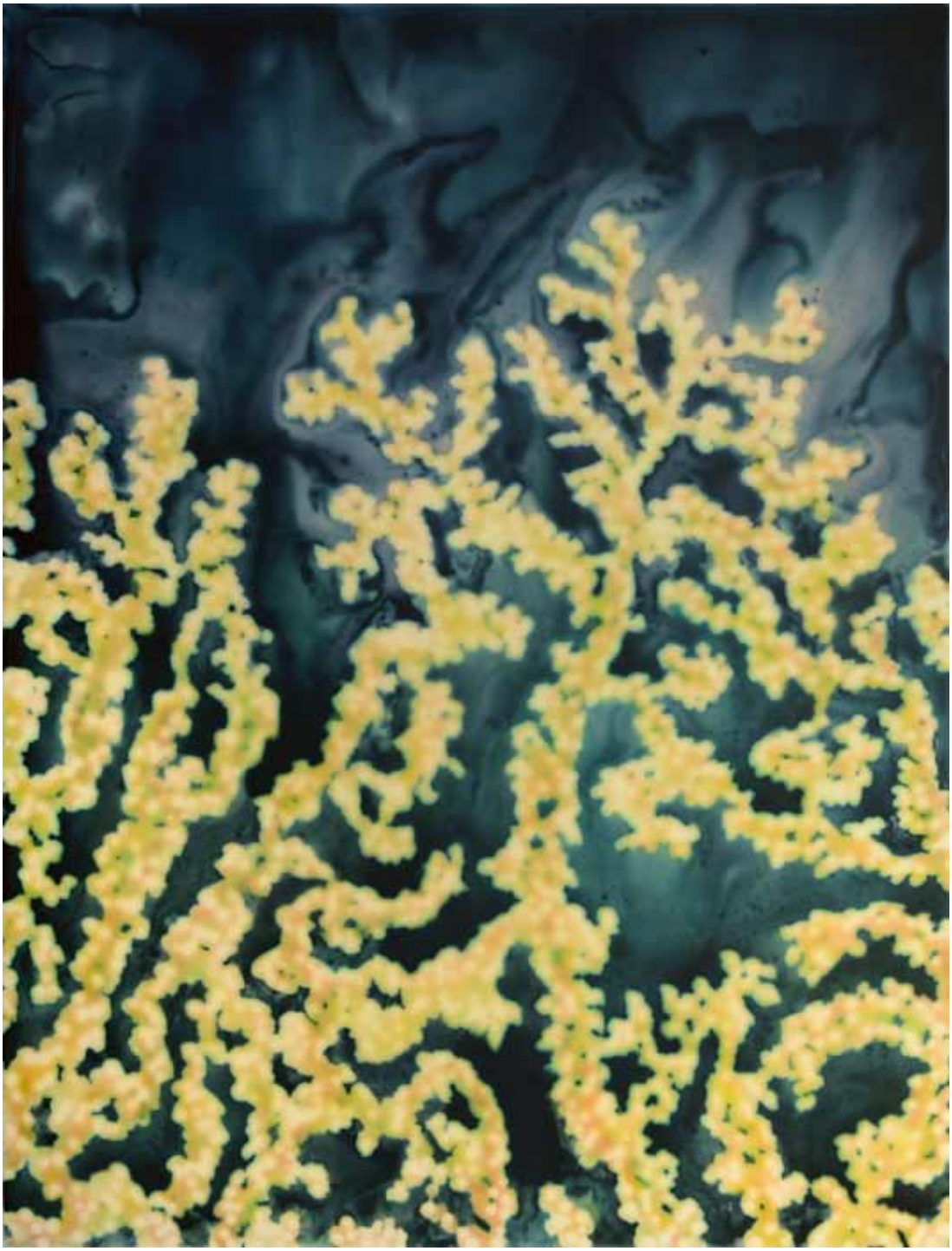
**EL: I thought your use of coral is interesting in the way it can appear both as a very real, defined object and also as an amorphous abstraction that resonates as a broader, almost atmospheric sensation. You mention it as a more personal way to capture climate change, as well—how so?**

JC: By personal, I was thinking about the studio – finding a way to transform the broad topic of climate change into my own aesthetic language. The simultaneously abstract and representational aspects of coral that you mention are precisely what attracted me to them as a subject. There's a tremendous diversity of forms within coral structure, and coral are often suggestive in that micro/macro way.

*Jaq Chartier | Core Sample, 2013, acrylic, stains and dyes on wood panel, 24 x 18 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

**EL: Do you consider your work a form of activism, in terms of its bringing attention to environmental issues?**

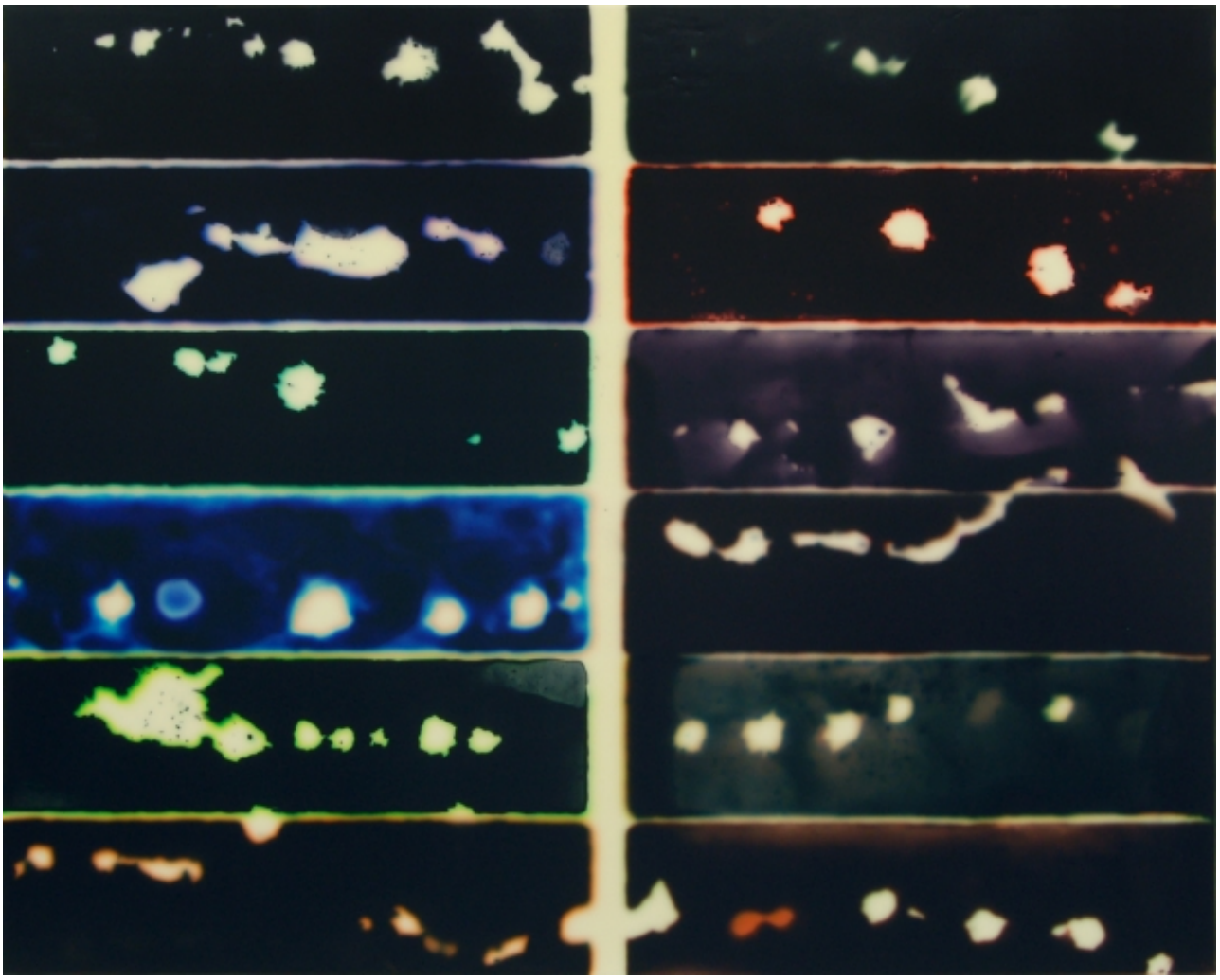
JC: Maybe activism-lite. I don't mean to trivialize what I'm doing; it's just that I still have so much to learn about the issues. Right now, the process of making the paintings is drawing me closer to the subject, and I'm just following my curiosity.



*Jaq Chartier | Golden Coral, 2013, acrylic, stains, spray paint on wood panel, 42 x 32 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

**EL: Your earlier *Testing* series integrates scientific imagery, such as DNA charts and microscope slides, with the physical testing of materials you orchestrate through the stains and formulas you combine with conventional paint mediums; this feels like a highly original process. Your newer work relates more overtly to traditional painterly imagery, such as landscapes and maps. Was this a conscious shift in your practice or do you see the two bodies of work as continuous?**

JC: I don't see them as continuous. I'm using the same materials for the new paintings, but otherwise the two bodies of work seem to be on separate tracks for now. I haven't given up the *Testing* series, as I love exploring color and the interactions of the materials. Those paintings are stripped down to very specific rules; each painting must be an actual test of some kind, and every element has to be there for a reason which supports the test. The newer paintings are a more traditional kind of picture making, and it's a refreshing counterpoint which I seem to need right now, to open the process again.



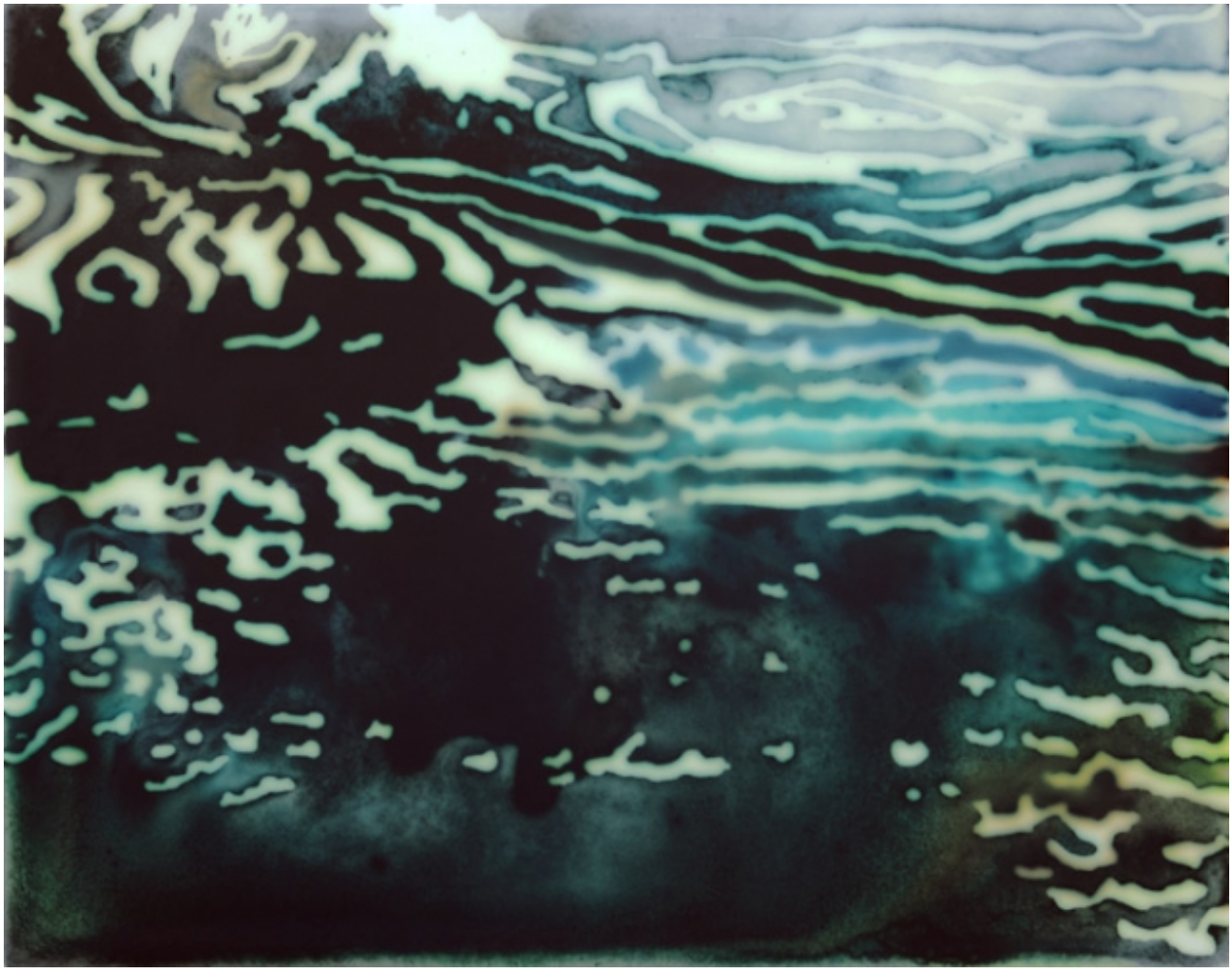
*v*

*Jaq Chartier | 12 Samples, 2012, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 50 x 40 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

**EL: The stains you create and utilize in your paintings are designed to change over time.  Are you at a point in your practice that you can anticipate the forms those changes will take, or do you still experience surprises?**

JC: The paintings in *SubOptic* will change in subtle ways over time to reflect the problem of coral bleaching, but in this case it won't be anything dramatic. I can make paintings that completely disappear, (such as the piece I documented in a video titled *Sun Test: Time Lapse*), but that wasn't my goal here. The idea of change is a place where the two bodies of work can overlap, and I'm sure I will be exploring that more over the next few years.

And yes, I'm still surprised every day by these materials. While I'm making each piece, throughout all the layers and various steps in the process, I'm holding an image of the painting in my head which I know can only be an approximation of the final result. Each time, after I've applied the final coating of white acrylic medium, I walk away never sure what I'll see when I return the next day. It's like waiting for a Polaroid photo to develop. There's a period of time where it's just a field of white, wet mystery, and anything could happen.



*Jaq Chartier | Elephant Ear Coral Landscape, 2013, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 11 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Platform Gallery.*

---

*SubOptic is on view at Platform Gallery in Seattle, WA through October 12. Jaq Chartier lives and works in Seattle. She earned her BFA from the University of Massachusetts and her MFA from the University of Washington. Her work has recently been exhibited at Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Portland, OR), the Frye Art Museum (Seattle, WA), Robischon Gallery (Denver, CO), Morgan Lehman Gallery (New York, NY), and Haines Gallery (San Francisco, CA). Chartier was a finalist in the Contemporary Northwest Art Awards (2011) and a Neddy Fellowship Award nominee (2005 and 2006), and she is the recipient of a Purchase Award from Seattle Public Utilities (2013 and 2003).*

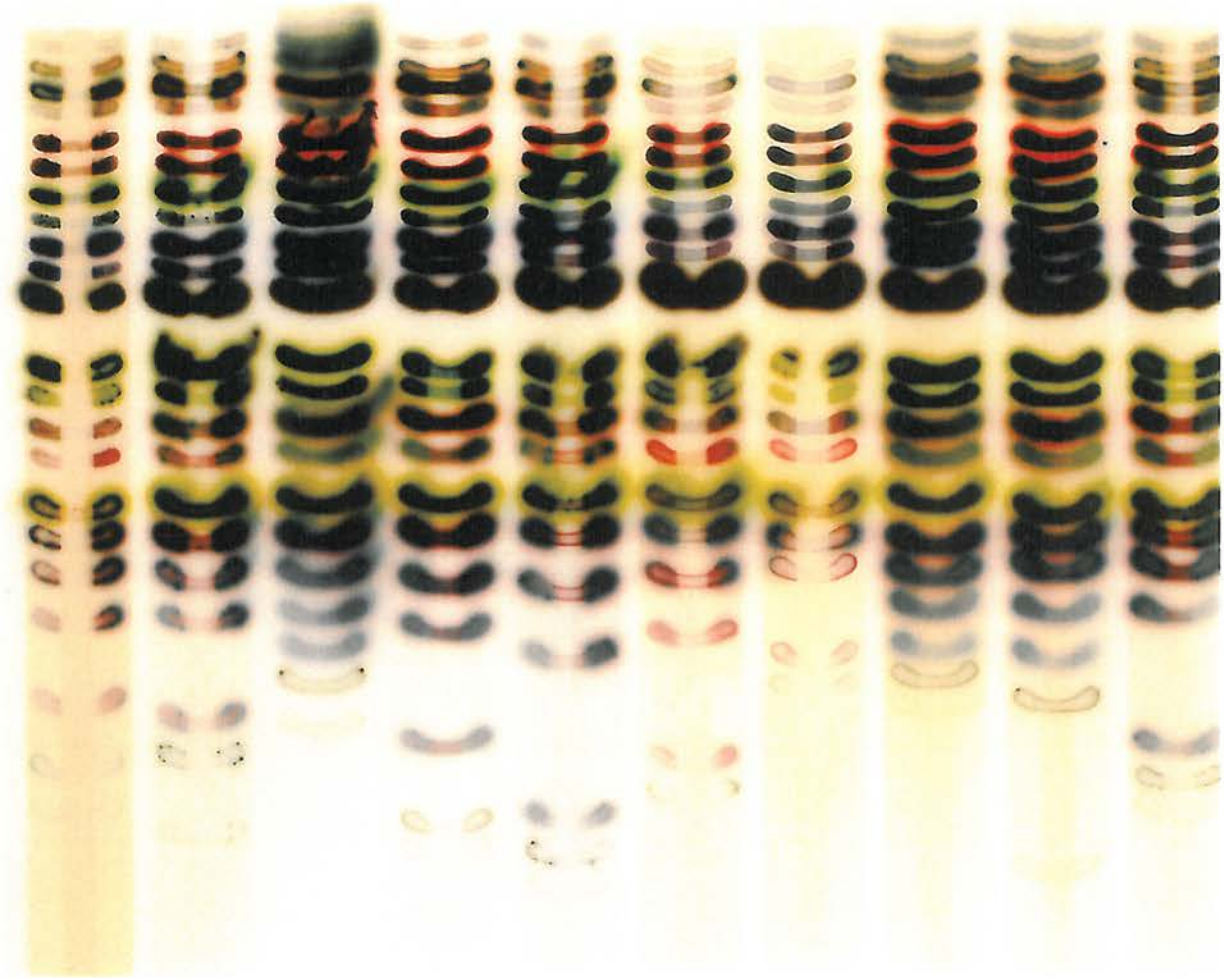
*Erin Langer is a writer and museum professional based in Seattle, WA.*

art ltd.
september 2008

: artist profile **jaq chartier**

The question "Is it science or art?" is both redundant and moot for Seattle-based painter Jaq Chartier. In her work, science and art merge in a kind of mutual commentary, grounded in the artist's exacting trials and tests. Her compositions offer smears and stains atop off-white planes, viral-looking shapes weeping and bubbling up in extravagant DayGlo colors: fuchsias upon acid greens upon turquoise, blood-orange into canary yellow, flowing into each other with fuzzy, Rothko-esque transitions. Rarely have de-facto science experiments exuded such panache.

Chartier painted seascapes and still lifes as a child and young adult in Palmer, Massachusetts. In college at Syracuse University and the University of Massachusetts, she considered becoming a filmmaker, but the siren-song of painting would not leave her. Eventually she made her way west to Seattle, where she earned her MFA from the University of Washington, and where she still lives. It was in 1997, while freelancing as a technical instructor for Golden Paints, that Chartier had her "Eureka!" moment. In the midst of preparing color and finish comparisons between various paints, she found herself gripped by the idea of turning the tests into actual paintings, in which she could compare and contrast, side-by-side, the interactions between materials as they reacted to one another and to outside forces. It was a fascination, if not an obsession, that has endured to the present day.



SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

# Jaq Chartier breaks down decay to its most beautiful elemental forms

*Friday, September 8, 2006*

**By REGINA HACKETT**
P-I ART CRITIC

In the early 1980s, when John Russell observed that a "painting is a vegetable construct that changes in time," Jaq Chartier was in college, decades away from creating the work that could serve as Russell's Exhibit A.

Chartier consciously thinks of her paintings as organic material and uses the decay she experimentally induces as a formal device to achieve abstract patterns, what might be called maps of an aesthetic DNA.

**art review**

**BLINDSIGHT: JAQ CHARTIER**

**WHERE:** Platform Gallery, 114 Third Ave. S.

**WHEN:** Through Oct. 7. Hours: Thursdays-Saturdays 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Her latest series of sun-stroked and serially stained paintings, collectively titled "Blindsight," are on view at Platform Gallery. Few painters achieve such a tight fusion of form and content. Chartier thinks of her studio as a laboratory and her artistic practice as a mission impossible, hence her title, the ability to see what can't be seen.

Using an eyedropper or a stick, she draws her stacked coils or circles in various stains on wood panel covered in gesso. She then covers the stains with layers of white paint and sees which ones bleed through to the surface and in what configuration.

She likens her process to someone trying to paint over a water stain on a basement door. The stain tends to bleed through.

Exposing her painted panels to direct sunlight influences the chemistry of the color changes, causing some colors to blur. Occasionally she'll cover portions of a painting with tape. The colors that are sun-exposed bleed, while those shaded tend to retain clearer contours, causing the clear and the fuzzy to collide.

Computer love: If machines develop the consciousness to make art, they'll undoubtedly want to hitch their search engines to Chartier's star. Her dots in a stacked Q-Tip pattern and her blurred holes burning like distant stars appear to be glorified fragments of computer code, instead of what they are, abstractions in a serial mode.

Half a century ago, abstraction was a clean break with narrative. As Frank Stella famously observed about his own work, what you see is what you get. Don't look for inner meaning. There isn't any.

Today, the back story is back. Abstraction is "about" something more than line and color. Chartier's paintings are a merger of color saturated bloom and blight.

Memento mori: Her life-in-death theme takes purest form in a small piece not listed for sale and on view only because the process of its making is tracked on an accompanying video. In the middle of a plain white field, an orange blaze creates a partial horizon line, with ghost shadows rising behind it. Willy Loman's brother came to him in dreams to warn that the woods were burning. They're burning in this painting with Loman-like intensity.

Occasionally, Chartier's codes looks coin-operated. Colors float in creamy white, but there's something formulaic in the delivery. Most of the time, her handwritten notes on the surface fail to add anything worth adding. Chartier is a process painter, but labeling the details dilutes the impact of her grizzled radiance.

On the other hand, for an artist who is working within a focused, small range, she keeps pushing at the boundaries of what she is able to do. She's not what Lester Young called a repeater pencil. Each painting is an experiment that she engages on its own terms, subjecting her original patterns to chance decay but giving them the chance to assert themselves.

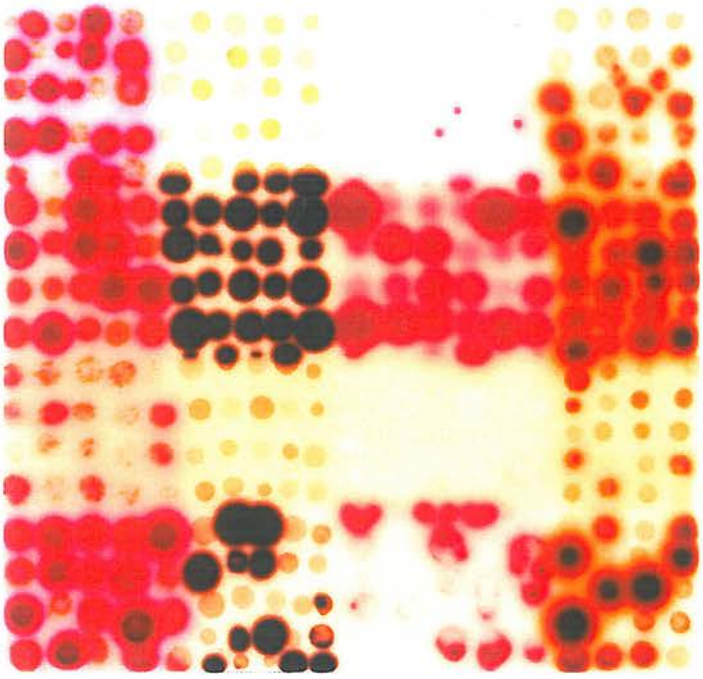
Assert themselves they do. A vertical grid of "Greens" is what you might see if a heart monitor were hooked up to the universe. "Chart: 11 Stains/7 Whites" is a night-flight over Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie." In a triumph of beauty over time, "Burnt Orange (net)" simultaneously presents the life cycle of an orange lattice. The lattice glows with youth on the right and sags in the center. On the left is clearly its exit, with its pattern faded to a tracery of ash.

Ultimately, what Chartier is exploring is not science or fragments of genetic code. It's an update of something as old as art itself, a new version of Dust Thou Art. Her coils are mortal, yet they flare brightly before their promised ends.

---

Seattle Magazine, May '05





# The Art of Science

What happens when you combine the study of DNA with furniture dye and spray paint? Seattle artist Jaq Chartier has made a career of investigating such peculiar queries, and in *Testing* (Marquand Books, January 2005, $15), a new book that highlights a collection of paintings created over a number of years, we get an up-close glimpse of Chartier's unique medium and scientific style. Using her canvas as a laboratory, Chartier blends the above-mentioned elements, as well as acrylic paints and various stains, with outside variables such as time and sunlight to make colorful paintings that resemble DNA strands and cell patterns. And because every combination of materials creates a unique outcome, each painting becomes an experiment in what occurs when different materials collide. "I am thinking of the paintings as characters; I want to see what they will do when they interact," says Chartier, who claims that she focuses on science-inspired shapes because they're a metaphor for the unpredictable reactions between her materials. Chartier's beautiful DNA-inspired paintings—two of which are currently being shown at the Platform Gallery *(114 Third Ave. S; 206.323.2808; platformgallery.com)*, where *Testing* is available for purchase—prove the artist to be a leader in the fascinating world of "process" art. *Ashley Wiggin*

A Jaq Chartier painting: DNA never looked so good

TECH

# GENETIC DISORDER

## STEVEN SHAVIRO ON BIOAESTHETICS

**JEFFREY THOMAS'S SCIENCE-FICTION** short story "The Reflections of Ghosts" (1995) tells of an artist named Drew, whose medium is cloning. Drew grows clones of himself in womblike vats, manipulates their development in gruesome ways—deforming their bodies and crippling their minds—and turns them into living works of art. He releases some to wander the city until they die and sells others to rich art patrons, who torture and kill the clones for the amusement of their dinner-party guests. Drew rationalizes this by telling himself that his clones have such feeble minds that they aren't really human and cannot suffer very much. Everything changes, however, when he grows a female clone of himself, becomes enamored of his own creation, and starts having sex with her. . . .

Of course, Thomas's chilling fable goes well beyond what biotechnology can actually do today, but the gap between fantasy and fact is rapidly closing. It seems likely that within my daughter's lifetime, if not my own, we will be able to clone ourselves, create hybrid organisms through gene splicing, incorporate silicon chips in our brains, interface machinery directly with our nervous systems, and reset our neurotransmitter and hormone levels at will.

Technological innovation, especially in biology, is inherently risky and unpredictable, because it is less an affair of manipulating the external world than one of experimenting on—and thereby altering—ourselves. How can we come to terms with these new technologies, when their very effect is to change who "we" are? How do we judge them, when they undermine, or render irrelevant, the norms and criteria that ground our judgments? This is the fatal flaw that vitiates recent attempts to construct a bioethics or a biopolitics. We are already having trouble dealing with the limited forms of cloning and genetic engineering that we are capable of today. What will we do when advances in these practices force us to redefine, more and more radically, what we mean by such basic concepts as self, life, humanity, and nature?

I'd like to suggest that we are faced here with a problem of aesthetics rather than one of ethics. I use these terms in the strictest Kantian sense. Ethics, for Kant, is universal. An ethical judgment is valid at all times and for all situations. Aesthetics, by contrast, is singular and ungrounded. An aesthetic judgment, Kant says, is not just a personal preference; in making it, I must go beyond my own subjectivity. But neither is such a judgment objective. I am forced to make a decision without having any preexisting rules to guide me, and I must try to convince other people that I am right without having any common foundation to appeal to. An aesthetic judgment responds to a particular, contingent situation; it cannot be repeated, generalized, or codified.

In order to confront the new biotechnology, then, we need a *bioaesthetics* more than a bioethics. We need an aesthetic practice that is as radical and innovative as the biological sciences themselves have been. Biological art, however, is still in its infancy; just look at the time line. Eduardo Kac first proposed the idea of transgenic art in 1998, and his own earliest example of it, Alba the genetically altered, glow-in-the-dark bunny, was born in 2000. The first major retrospective of the genre, "Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics," including work by Kac and others, was put together only in 2002. (It will travel to Minneapolis and Evansville, Indiana, this year). Today, in 2004, artists and activists—most notably Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), whose work is featured in "Gene(sis)"—have started to talk about putting genetic engineering in the hands of the general public, but moving from talk to action remains an open question. We are still far from the vision of Paul DiFilippo, in whose science-fiction book *Ribofunk* (1996) "home amino-linkers and chromo-cookers" flourish the way meth labs do today.

**TO CONFRONT THE NEW BIOTECHNOLOGY, WE NEED A *BIOAESTHETICS* MORE THAN A BIOETHICS: AN AESTHETIC PRACTICE AS RADICAL AS THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES THEMSELVES HAVE BEEN.**

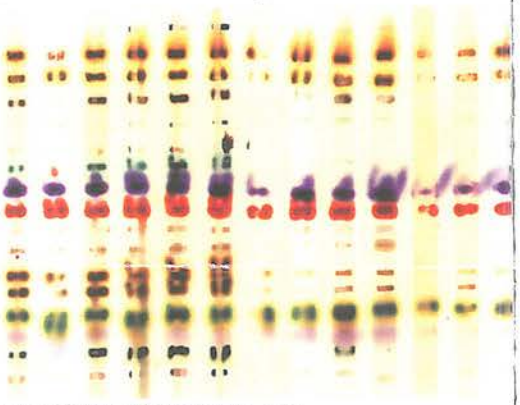
"Gene(sis)" is symptomatic of the current self-limiting nature of genetic artistic practice. Too many of the works in this exhibition are merely illustrative rather than truly innovative. Their take on genetics is overly simplistic. For instance, Jaq Chartier's paintings transform gel-electrophoresis readouts (used to analyze strands of DNA) into ravishing visual abstractions. Such works fail to consider how DNA as image is embedded in and produced out of a wide range of technological, medical, forensic, and legal practices. They attribute almost magical powers to DNA, even as they ostensibly question the instrumentalism and gene-centrism of mainstream biotechnology.

At the opposite extreme from most of the pieces and artists in "Gene(sis)," Critical Art Ensemble has done more than anyone to analyze the rhetoric of genetics and to unravel the political economy of the biotech industry. CAE's work is exemplary for the way it mixes thoroughgoing critique with sarcastic and highly theatrical agitprop. Their project *Cult of the New Eve*, 2000, for instance, literalizes the salvational rhetoric often found in propaganda for the biotech industry by enacting the rituals of a cult dedicated to sacraments of transgenic beer and wafers. Meanwhile, CAE's publications, like the recent *Molecular Invasion* (2002), analyze both the claims and the activities of the biotech industry, and offer counterproposals for "fuzzy biological sabotage."

But I can't help feeling that CAE is just not science-fictional enough. In its call for public participation in the decisions about technology that are currently made by corporations and agencies without any public accountability, CAE remains in the sphere of a universalizing biopolitics, one that seeks to minimize risk. The group does not take up the unique challenges of what I have been calling bioaesthetics. While its critique of domination is important, CAE can be faulted for refusing to engage the sheer weirdness, excessiveness, and *otherness* of biotechnology.

Bioaesthetics needs to be excessive as well as critical. It must be wasteful, extravagant, and nonutilitarian. It must be ready, at any moment, to turn back upon itself, experiment upon itself, and put itself at risk, as the ethically dubious artist does in Jeffrey Thomas's short story. It must try to imagine the unimaginable, to ask questions that are not supposed to be asked, and to transgress the limits of positivist understanding. Bioaesthetics will be convulsive or not at all. □

Steven Shaviro is professor of cinema studies at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Left: **Critical Art Ensemble, *Cult of the New Eve*, 2000.** Performance still. Right: **Jaq Chartier, *Dye Sequence*, 2000,** acrylic, ink, chemical stains, and spray paint on panel, 24 x 36".



JAN. '04

Elizabeth Leach
GALLERY

# Jaq Chartier and Elisabeth Scheidl at LIMN Gallery

The best art forces us to do one of two things: scrutinize a topic or gain a wider perspective on it—that is, view something in close-up or from 30,000 feet. A work like Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, for example, treats a general concept—women's roles in history and art—using vivid, detailed references, whereas Maya Lin's memorials present historical events from a broad viewpoint. *Testing* and *New Work*, two programs on view simultaneously at LIMN Gallery, featured pieces by Jaq Chartier and Elisabeth Scheidl, respectively, attempting a modest version of this dichotomy.

The two artists' methods couldn't have been more different, and resulted in mixed effect. On one end of the space, Seattle-based Chartier displayed fifteen works created by dripping or drizzling stains onto a painted surface, resulting in greater or lesser rates of absorption. If this sounds as interesting as watching paint dry, it wasn't—not in the least: the results, depending upon the color, degree of saturation and surface onto which it was dripped, varied greatly, resulting in super-hued grids of glowing electric dots or long filaments of smoldering color.

Process-based art so raw that one could still read the stains' hues jotted in pencil on the works' edges, *Testing* was rooted in gel electrophoresis, the procedure in which DNA samples are injected with dye and jolted with current in order to separate (and catalog) their molecular weight.

Yet, while it had the whiff of the laboratory, with its columns and notations (and titles like *Test #1* and *5 Reactions*), Chartier's array hearkened more the experimental pill-and-pot-leaf works of Fred Tomaselli, or the T-shirts spotted with mud from Charles Linder's bicycle rides, than those concocted by some hard-core science nerd.

The best works were the weirdest. *Stain Lines (w/Watermelon)* featured slashes of hot pink, greenish black, magenta and fiery rust; *Pure Stains* displayed dots of lemon, violet and bloodred in four long strips; *Green & Red Sequence* juxtaposed turquoise and sea foam greens with shades of crimson. Overall, the work felt inflamed, infectious, contagious, biological; it called up associations with solar photography, old photographs and fresh wounds. Chartier seems well at home with the science stuff (her work appeared in the *Gene(sis)* show last year at the Berkeley Art Museum), but she succeeds in tapping feelings far more corporeal.

Across the gallery, twelve paintings by San Francisco painter Scheidl, also brightly colored, took the opposite approach, zooming out to display whimsical, light-as-a-feather abstracts that evoked hastily drawn maps, diagrams or schematics. Some elements within the collection were consistent—checkerboard grids, curlicues and stairways—but each piece felt distinctly dreamlike, distant. The works' titles, including *Gazpacho*, *Meddling* and *Some Kind of Picnic*, intrigued but finally failed to ground or contextualize beyond mere suggestion.

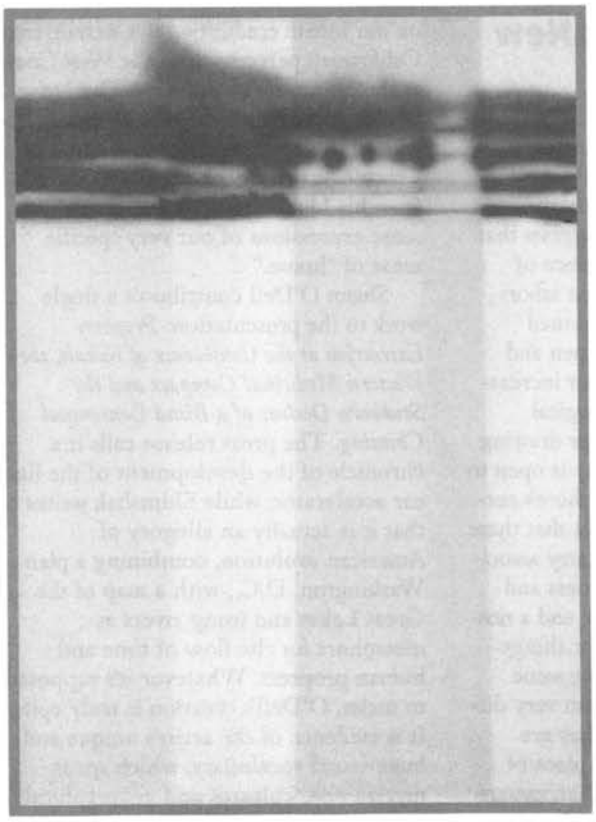
In contrast to Chartier's, Scheidl's paintings felt impersonal, airy and detached. While one piece like *Altitude*, a sort of blueprint centered in a bull's-eye of white concentric circles, felt vaguely threatening, another like *Hands Off, Gino*, with its yellow bands viewed between what looked like pickets in a fence, was innocuous. Overall, the work suggested the doodlings of Paul Klee or the patterns of Gustav Klimt, yet lacked both artists' refined compositional sense.

Abstract paintings with entirely different means and ends, LIMN's featured artists explored this microcosmic/macrocosmic duality to greater or lesser effect, nodding to science or cartography in roundabout ways. In the end, Scheidl's work felt almost of a bygone era, like quilting, while Chartier's felt hazardous, ominous and futuristic. Though it didn't, finally, quite hold together, the show explored two ends of a spectrum, pushing ideas that left one interested, if not fully intrigued.

*—Colin Berry*

*Jaq Chartier: Testing* and *Elisabeth Scheidl: New Work* closed May 1 at LIMN Gallery, San Francisco.

Colin Berry is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.



Jaq Chartier, *5 Reactions (w/Magenta #1)*, 2003, acrylic, stains, paint on wood panel, 22" x 16", at LIMN Gallery, San Francisco.

207 SW Pine Street
Portland, OR 97204
503-224-0521
FAX 503-224-0844

NEW YORK
SCHROEDER ROMERO GALLERY
JAQ CHARTIER: TESTING
28 February – 7 April 2003
www.schroederromero.com

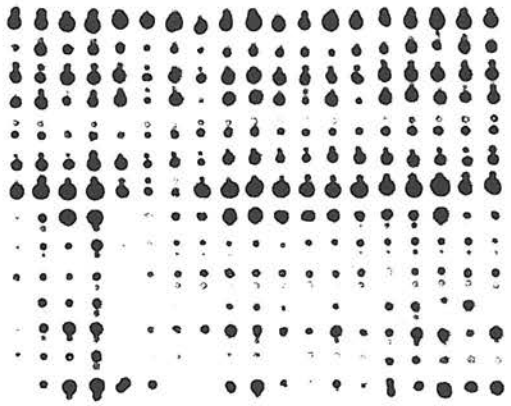
With our minds so conditioned to perceive the external world in technological terms, one could easily mistake Jaq Chartier's new collection of paintings as simple mimicry of scientific imagery. However, her work should not be understood as anything beyond what it materially represents: empirical tests that reflect various chemical reactions between stains of spray-paint and a coat of clear acrylic that evenly coats the wood-panel surfaces.

*Saturation Chart 9/02* is comprised of lines of dots grouped in vertical pairs, with particular amounts of coloured paint blurring at different intensities as they dry into the translucent layer of acrylic. Similar to work by Helen Frankenthaler, Chartier explores the limits of lucid pigmentation, yet she is unwilling to surrender entirely to random abstraction as Frankenthaler did. Rather, Chartier seeks to confine colour within small circular spaces and reveal how it either gradates or saturates into different hues while drying. *In TipTest (1/03)* the artist challenges the durability of colours with extrinsic physical movement. Giving form to tone, each dot within Chartier's work takes on its own life, as randomness resides within effect.

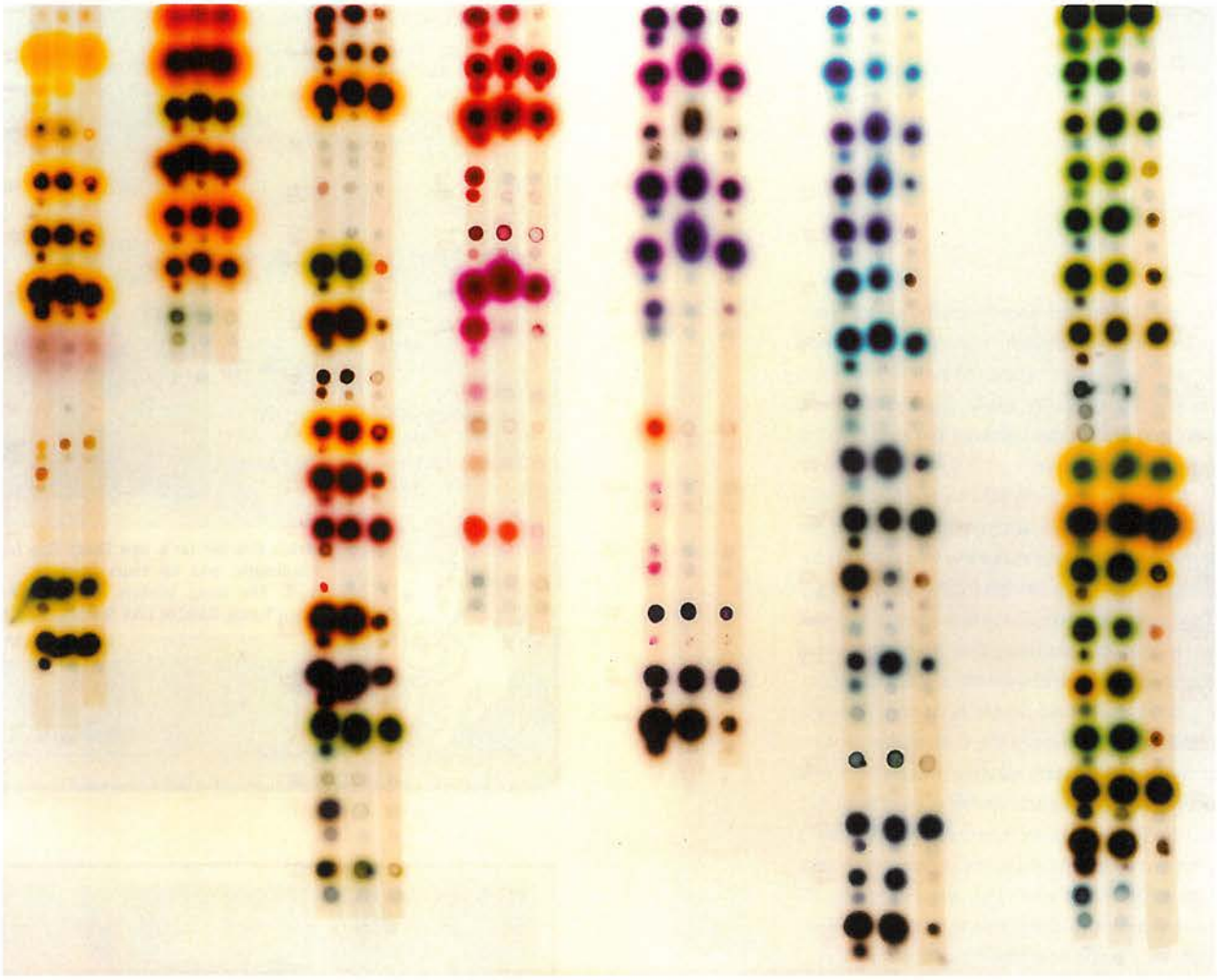
*4 Reactions* is rather similar to the first piece, except in this instance the wood panel is divided into four grid-like sections that contain different degrees of artistic experimentation. *Red and Blue Deposits* appears more vibrant, yet relaxed, as the inks gradually seep downward, conveying a very subdued essence. This programmatic process leads repeatedly to an unpredictability that shows how far we have moved away from investing a high level of significance within the material aspect of a work of art.

Does this collection of new, abstract art prove that scientific subjects like microbiology have found representation within the realm of visual art? Although it is tempting to contextualise Chartier's work alongside scientific discovery, it should not be perceived in such literal terms. Chartier's interest in scientific depictions does not signify her own repetition of it, but rather a curiosity to move painting beyond it. Her work brings art back to one of its origins, as the articulation of biological-looking forms appeals to the organic nature of feeling.

JILL CONNER



Jaq Chartier, Saturation Chart (9/02), 2002, acrylic, stains and paint on wood panel. Courtesy: Schroeder Romero Gallery, Brooklyn



# WEIRD SCIENCE

**ART AND CHEMISTRY COLLIDE IN THE LAB OF JAQ CHARTIER. BY BESS LOVEJOY**

Jaq Chartier swears she never played with those dorky chemistry sets as a kid. Nonetheless, she's beginning to feel a creative kinship with scientists these days. "I think of scientists as being really creative, I mean they're just curious as hell," she argues on a sunny morning in Seattle's International District. "They're trying to figure out how the world works and how can we use this, how can we play with this—it's not any different than playing with some paint on your brush."

Chartier holds the distinction of the only painter included in *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics*, a major group exhibition coming to Berkeley this August and Minneapolis next January. She says she's fascinated by the process of scientific inquiry, the drives behind it and the mysterious results it produces. But her work deals with science in an oblique fashion: She doesn't paint portraits of scientific objects. Rather, she *builds* paintings that end up resembling blood, mold or DNA, using an idiosyncratic process of experimentation that's part scientific method and part divine chance.

*Testing*, her latest project, investigates how pigments react to various chemicals and with one another. A recent painting-in-progress features horizontal stripes of color crossed by vertical layers of spray-on stain-blocker. The point, Chartier says, lies in examining the "chemistry between the materials and their almost intimate interaction" with the stain-blockers as the pigments bleed up and out. This summer, she's planning another painting that will showcase the interactions between certain stains and the sun.

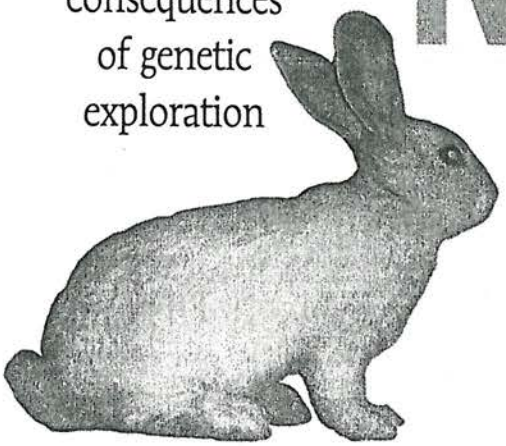
When asked about her impetus, Chartier says that the thrill is in the chase—for new reactions, new images and new questions. "Scientists and artists share a curiosity and awe about the mystery of life," she adds. "The artist's impulse is very similar to the scientist's, but mirrors it in a way that's just non-threatening. So we get away with it!"



2003

# Messing with Mother Nature

## Contemporary artists take a mostly playful look at the consequences of genetic exploration



Eduardo Kac's "GFP Bunny" is a poster of a real rabbit that has been genetically altered to glow fluorescent green when under a blue light.

BY REGINA HACKETT
*P-I art critic*

In Catherine Wagner's photo, a small pool of light breaks through darkness to surround a translucent glass bottle beaded with sweat. Across its front, a label made of masking tape bears the scrawled words, "Definitely Not Sterile."

Opening today at the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery, "Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics" is a new look at the messy business of being alive. Organized by Henry curator Robin Held, the show features 28 U.S. and European artists who are responding directly to the Human Genome Project.

Started in the United States in 1990, the now worldwide project is charged with identifying all 30,000 genes in human DNA, determining their chemical sequences and addressing the ethical, legal, medical and social issues likely to arise when key biological codes hit the street.

This is well-worn territory for sci-fi writers, who for more than a century have been imagining misuses of such knowledge. Will we create androids that dream of electric sheep (Philip Dick), make monsters (Mary Shelley), or erase ourselves at will, to see what others are doing when they think we aren't there (H.G. Wells)?

While the Genome Project could prove key to eradicating diseases, couldn't it also help smooth the rough body blueprint, leaving us less interesting? The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke was reluctant to seek treatment for depression, saying, "If my devils leave me, might not my angels?"

Visual artists are weighing in on this subject as never before, but if they're doomsayers, they didn't make Held's final cut. She likes artists who begin with something resembling scientific method and end with oddity, sly wit and wonder.

Quite a few comics slipped in to make science ridiculous, including Dario Robleto, who ground into powder his mother's soul records, suggesting that "soul" can be distilled from vinyl and taken in pill form in the morning, with juice.

Savvy cartoonists (courtesy of New York's Creative Time) contributed art on paper coffee cups, including Roz Chast with "Genetic Engineering Hits a Snag"

SEE GENES, E3

A human and a leopard become one in Daniel Lee's large-scale digitally altered photograph from his 1994 "Judgment" series.

*FROM E1*

(the product of genius genes gets failing grades and won't clean her room). I love the bold, alarmist graphics on Larry Miller's cup, sure to interest the anxious: "Who owns your genes? Good question . . . Copyright Your DNA (you left some on this cup)."

Unfortunately, the Henry couldn't get a sponsor to pay for mass production of the cups (roughly $15,000), or we'd each be able to take a few home, part of the give-away-art-in-museums movement begun in the early 1990s by the irreplaceable Felix Gonzales-Torres.

Miller contributed more to this show than a paper cup. He's hoping that genetic engineering can change not only the future but the past. To this end, he contributed and persuaded his mother to contribute blood, fingernails, hair and skin samples to his visual art bank. Only when science can use these leavings to recreate his twin sister, who died at birth, can it be opened.

Using oil and encaustic, painter Jaq Chartier improvises on the theme of DNA sequences, turning biological code into bare, ruined choirs, bright wreckage adrift in painterly fog. Inigo Manglano-Ovalle's use of similar sequences is far more literal. He photographs them, delivering abstractions with a jittery bite.

Both Chartier's and Manglano-Ovalle's work looks abstract but isn't. Each is a map of identity. In the face in posters in this show. How the bunny is bearing up under the burden of being a lurid light source isn't Kac's concern. Far more interesting is Kac's "Genesis," a large oval of light projecting onto a darkened gallery wall and teaming with cellular life.

Catherine Chalmers' photographs of genetically engineered mice give these pawns of medical science a deeply disturbing dignity. Equally unnerving are Orit Raff's photos of absences, the elusive remains of human presence in empty rooms.

"Gene(sis)" doesn't end in the gallery. Visitors intrigued by Shawn of such maps, such exacting behavioral predictors, will the concept of free will wither and die?

Susan Robb believes in the leap of faith. She poses herself certain questions – such as, "What is the chemical formula for falling in love?" – and feels her way to metaphoric answer by creating sculptures out of moss, cake, spit, Play-Doh, pipe cleaners, chocolate or whatever strikes her.

Once these objects satisfy, she photographs them with a macro lens to create what look like internal landscapes. Instead of recording her procedures (science), she destroys them, leaving the prints to stand alone (art).

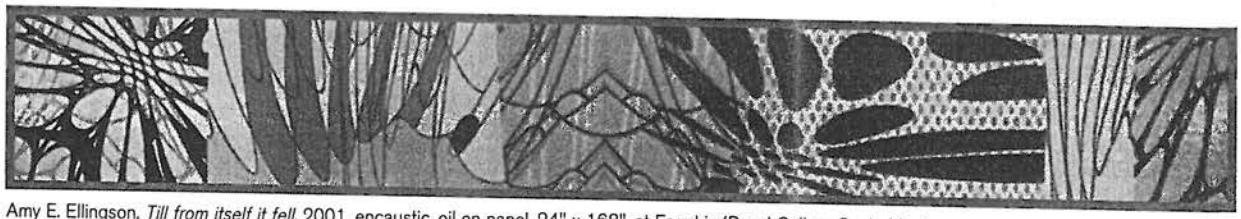
Eduardo Kac's bunny is part jellyfish. Under ultraviolet light, it glows green. He developed it with a French geneticist and appears with it Brixey and Richard Rinehart's giant thumbprint can visit a version on the Internet, where it serves as a maze. Moving through it, you can leave code behind, protecting you from a mutating Minotaur that seeks you out. Why stick with art or bother with science when the exalted realm of game culture beckons?

P-I art critic Regina Hackett can be reached at 206-448-8332 or reginahackett@seattlepi.com.

Artweek

MARCH 2002
VOLUME 33
ISSUE 2

$4.00



Amy E. Ellingson, *Till from itself it fell*, 2001, encaustic, oil on panel, 24" x 168", at Frumkin/Duval Gallery, Santa Monica.

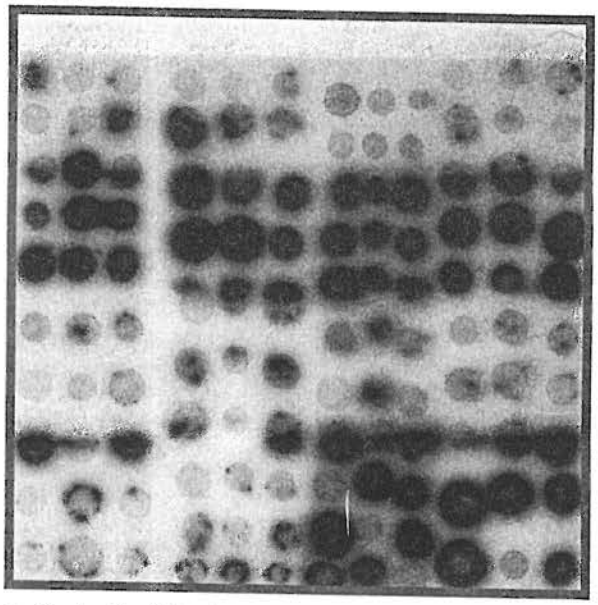
# Southern California

## Jaq Chartier and Amy Ellingson at Frumkin/Duval Gallery

*It has been argued, already three generations ago, that the modifications brought to the representation of physical reality by the Muslim world in the ninth century had a religious, even a theological, meaning. By withdrawing from a recreation of tangible or visible reality, the modifications, it was argued by the great French scholar Louis Massignon, expressed the impermanence of the visible, an alleged tenet of the Muslim ethos.*

—Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, 1992

Issues of representation have always been of interest to visual artists but acquired particular relevance in western culture after the Abstract Expressionists of the New York School sponsored a sweeping adjustment in thinking on the subject. They proposed that what is profound in the most far-reaching sense (and this has been given many names ranging from those of deities, to death, to that which is nameless) exists in the imagination of the artist/subject and not as copies of real world scenes like portraits, landscapes or still lifes. The Abstract Expressionist desire to present this view inspired a wholesale move within their group from representation to non-representation. These non-objective constructions (color-fields, drip paintings, etc.) took inspiration from the drift of artist intuition. The effort to illustrate the indescribable by eschewing representation makes some sense. If you cannot name it, or describe it, you probably will not see it in an image taken from daily life. This idea, though the impetus differs, has been present in the art produced by the Muslim world since the eighth century where the tenuousness, fragility and transience of the everyday have not been a point of transcendent focus. Contemplative attention is directed toward awareness of the ineffable, which, according to some Islamic religious dictates, is best expressed by non-representational repetition in the form of patterns and decorative motifs.



Jaq Chartier, *Tiny Walnut Tests #2*, 2001, acrylic, stains, spray paint on panel, 5" x 5", at Frumkin/Duval Gallery, Santa Monica.

The work of Jaq Chartier, in the exhibition *Testing* at Frumkin/Duval Gallery, takes part in this discussion. She says, "I'm interested in creating work that is real and direct—not a picture about something, a piece that is the thing itself, a record of what happened right there on the wood panel." She describes herself as an artist deeply engaged by process with a layperson's interest in science. She explores the behavior of pigments, inks, dyes and chemical stains layered on and between acrylic gels, gessoes and spray paints. Migration is her current subject for study. The products of her art-making are intimate panels featuring soft, satiny, neutral grounds where colorful materials, often labeled informally in pencil, are arranged in regular groups of rows of a single repeated form, like dots. These bleed, spread, blur, shift and halo, softening the outline of the original form. The result is, artist intent aside, pretty patterns that become remarkable because of occasional eccentric details, but also because of the potential for the pigments to continue to drift, thus subtly changing the look of the panels with the passage of time. The Abstract Expressionists would say Chartier is attempting to show us "the now" or "the lived moment." A similar method aimed at showing the "unnamable" can be seen in the repetitive arrangements of forms such as circles on ancient and not so ancient Islamic tiles, made more interesting by the unevenness of the firing process and altered by distresses imposed over time.

Amy Ellingson's *Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall* takes a straightforward approach to the use of repetitive decorative devices as opposed to traditional representation to illustrate complex concepts. She employs pattern to explore common philosophical cyclical themes like continuity but also, importantly, change. She appropriates bits and pieces of iconography: letters, dots, logos, symbols, patterns, etc., from her surroundings. This visual information is fed into Photoshop where it is manipulated and eventually organized into a design that is then painted, using pigmented encaustic, onto (often) large panels with low-relief, plastic-like surfaces. These works are characterized by an overlapping mesh of odds and ends of a variety of visual information arranged in patterned segments. Variation within repetition is the key to expression of concept. Ellingson's produce is also "of the moment" in that it brings us (the viewer) closer to a distilled

# The Bleeding Edge of a Dot: Jaq Chartier's Fugitive Pleasures

Jaq Chartier creates sensuous abstract paintings that compellingly mix art and science, the visceral and the cerebral; they are both painstaking trials and fugitive pleasures. Her minimalist compositions of blurred ovoids chart the interaction of stains and dyes as they leach, bloom, bleed, merge, and mutate. The surfaces are visually seductive, composed of painted stains, milky films, and translucent layers; they are also archives of the rigorous testing and analysis of materials. Finally, these luminous, tactile panels are the result of an artist's active intellect, insatiable curiosity about her medium and process, and long hours of hard work; in short, works of fixation and accident. Of this process, the artist admits, "I'm really obsessed with the bleeding edge on a dot [of paint]. . . . There's something about that edge."[1]

I recently included several of Chartier's panels in an exhibition titled *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics*. This exhibition demonstrates the impact of genetic and genomic research on artistic practice and our notion of the artist-subject. Recent genetic research has provided artists with new tools, new materials, and new issues for critical consideration.[2] Chartier's practice has only an oblique connection to this subject. Like a number of contemporary artists including Christine Borland, Catherine Chalmers, Joe Davis, Eduardo Kac, and Susan Robb, Chartier is engaged in a hybrid artistic-scientific endeavor: her studio is more like a laboratory than the traditional artist's garret, and her practice involves non-hypothesis-driven research.

Through experimentation, observation, and notation, Chartier's artistic process makes each painting the result of a test to discover something about her materials and what they do. Charting the migration of water-soluble inks, dyes, and chemical stains through coats of gesso and acrylic resin, Chartier builds a painting slowly, layer by layer. As the stains are pulled through the paint by the resin, the composition emerges. Paintings such as *Tip Test #2* (1998), *Oil vs. Acrylic* (1998), *Kilz vs. BIN* (2001), and *4 Reactions* (2002)—titles that attest to such experimentation—feature acrylic paint test samples on gessoed wood panels. Regarding these trials, Chartier speaks less of "creating" a painting than she does of "finding" one.

Although her works involve meticulous investigation and analysis, chance is a key component of the process. In the first forty-eight hours after a painting is finished, water evaporates and stains continue to curdle and bleed. The most dramatic of these changes occur in the first few weeks. However, as some stains respond to other materials, to light, and to the passage of time, the painting continues to evolve and is never quite stable, or quite complete. The visual surprises that result from accepting this lack of control appeal to Chartier's restless imagination. She is thrilled by "the unruly moment when the painting jumps out of my hands and surprises me, speaks to me . . . [then] I see how little I really know, which means this journey isn't over yet."[3] It is for this joy of discovery that Chartier chooses to not use artist's pigments in her trials, since the particles in these pigments are too large to migrate. Rather, Chartier uses dyes, chemicals, laboratory slide stains, and other water-soluble materials composed of smaller particles, which allow the unexpected effects essential to her conceptual framework.

Chartier's recent work, such as *Blots and Dilutions* (2000), *4 Chemical Tests* (2000), *Dye Sequence* (2000), *Carbon Blue* (2001), and *Red/Green* (2002), demonstrates her fascination with images of gel electrophoresis, the process used to map DNA. (In fact, the artist continues to add to a large scrapbook of biological images, which includes pictures of mold, blood cells, and gel electrophoresis clipped from science journals.) Her paintings—which constitute a visual record where her findings are collected, managed, and stored—mirror these scientific tests, pictorially representing and archiving the vast information of a DNA strand. Chartier's process-oriented panels parallel the intensive attempt to test and understand this biological information.

This rigorous testing creates an unusual tension between the polished and the raw aspects of Chartier's work. The front of the panel

functions as an archive of her experimentation and as a reference for future tests, planting seeds for works yet to come. The side charts in shorthand her notations: findings obtained, effects created. For example, *4 Reactions* (2002) is a composition of four quadrants in which the same repeated stain pattern is subjected to four different household stain blockers, then coated with layers of acrylic resin. Like photographs developing in a darkroom, the combination of paint and resin activates the underlying water-soluble stains, dyes, and inks, creating a visually compelling array of surface effects. Depending on the concentration, density, evenness, and chemical composition of the spray coat, the stains migrate and leach, splatter and craze, and drift to the edges of a stain, creating halos. The margins of *4 Reactions* contain documentation of the specific materials used, charting variables and chemical reactions. These notations remain useful for future experimentation.

Chartier recently discovered fifteen new white spray paints and an array of new dyes, expanding exponentially the variables of her materials and the fugitive pleasures of her practice. Expect several lush new abstract paintings and fresh directions in Chartier's research during the coming months.

Chartier's work has been shown in solo exhibitions at Schroeder Romero Gallery, Brooklyn, New York (2003); Momus Gallery, Atlanta (2003, 2001); Frumkin/Duval Gallery, Santa Monica (2002); Limn Gallery, San Francisco (2002); William Traver Gallery, Seattle (2001, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995); Cervini Haas Gallery, Scottsdale (2000); and Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, Oregon (1997). She has received numerous awards, including the Artist Trust/Washington State Arts Commission Fellowship (2002); the Joan Mitchell Foundation award nominee (2001); PONCHO Special Recognition Award, Seattle Art Museum (2001); and the Artist Trust GAP Grant, Seattle (1999). Chartier currently lectures for Golden Artist Colors (1997–present), and was cocreator of a citywide open studio event that involved over 140 artists' studios (1999–2002). Chartier is represented by the William Traver Gallery, Seattle; Frumkin/Duval, Santa Monica; Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn, New York; and other galleries.

Robin Held, *Associate Curator*
Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington
December 2002

NOTES

1. Andrew Engelson, "Dot Matrix: Jaq Chartier Smears the Line Between Art and Science with Her DNA-Inspired Blobs," *Seattle Weekly,* March 28, 2002, p. 63.

2. *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics* tours nationally until the end of 2004. Venues include the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington (April 6–August 25, 2002); Berkeley Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley (August 26–December 7, 2003); Frederick Weisman Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (January 25–May 2, 2004); and the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois (September 10–November 28, 2004).

3. Engelson, op. cit., p. 63.