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Jennifer Samet, "Beer with a Painter, LA Edition: Lecia Dole-Recio," Hyperallergic, July 11, 2015

## HYPERALLERGIC

**Beer with a Painter, LA Edition: Lecia Dole-Recio**  
by Jennifer Samet on July 11, 2015



*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (bl.ppr.bl.trngls.rd.lns.)" (2013), acrylic, spray paint, paper, glue, and tape, 23 1/8 x 19 7/16 inches (photo by Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Gavlak Gallery)*

LOS ANGELES — I visited Lecia-Dole Recio in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, where she lives on a quiet curving street at the top of a hill, close to Dodger Stadium. Her house is set into the hillside, with an outer staircase and a view across the city, where jacaranda trees were in bloom, to the Hollywood sign in the distance. It was beautiful but non-imposing: with unpainted wood construction throughout the interior and exterior, a lush garden alongside the stairs, and her young son popping in a couple times to show me insects on the foliage and report on his excursion for ice cream. Moving through her indoor-outdoor space felt calm and relaxed; we talked on the terrace over beer and snacks. Her studio was set in the back of the house: an open room with a large worktable, cabinets, a few paintings in progress on the walls, and a paper-covered floor that was the site of a lot of painting activity. Dole-Recio makes abstract

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painted constructions: they are hybrids of painting and collage. Repeated geometric shapes form dynamic color compositions, and painterly moments punctuate them throughout. She utilizes cut shapes from older work, scraps, and residues of her painting process, recombining them with newer compositions. In a small back room were boxes of these elements: stencils and geometric paper shapes, half-covered in marks, lines, and drips.



*Lecia-Dole Recio at her home in Echo Park, Los Angeles (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)*

Among the fragments of materials on the table and walls were Lego stickers she had collected from her son, and knot diagrams she was considering as a possible compositional source. Her home and work environment were marked by this kind of fluid ease – where nothing was too precious or quotidian as to be off-limits, and the natural shifts and transitions were welcomed as part of the process.

Dole-Recio was born in 1971 in San Francisco and raised in San Diego. She completed her BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design before returning to California to get her MFA at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. She is currently represented by [Gavlak Gallery](#) in Los Angeles, where she will have a solo exhibition in the spring of 2016. She has had solo exhibitions at the Secession, Vienna (2011), Richard Telles Fine Art (2011, 2009, 2005, 2004, 2002), Casey Kaplan, New York (2009), and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2006). She was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, and the 2014 biennial exhibition, *Made in L.A.* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. In the fall, she will be included in *Paperworks*, an exhibition at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, opening September 26, 2015.

**Jennifer Samet:** *What was your early exposure to art and art-making?*

**Lecia Dole-Recio:** I grew up in San Diego, and my father was a painter and my mother a designer. There was a lot of love and respect for the arts. We traveled and spent time in museums. I remember going to the Museum of Modern Art in New York when I was quite young, and seeing the collection. I also remember the Robert Motherwell paintings at the Metropolitan Museum when I was in junior high. It was a huge deal to the Southern California skateboarder. I was majorly into skateboarding as a kid.

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I went to the Rhode Island School of Design and started as an architecture major. I was interested in architectural space, but quickly realized I didn't want to learn how to design. I shifted to printmaking. Then I was making monoprints and thought, "Why don't I just paint? Why do I need the machine to intervene? So my media got messier and messier, or at least more immediate.

I took a year off from RISD and went to the New York Studio School. I took a class with Elena Sisto, and learned so much from her in that one year. She didn't dismiss the wacky student who refused to draw the figure. It was not an act of resistance on my part; I was just more interested in the architecture of the room, the bodies in space, and how to respond to that. So she said, "Okay, we are going to talk about Mondrian and Hofmann, because clearly that's more relevant to you." It was an amazing, responsive way of teaching. She talked about Clyfford Still, and how many people can explain Clyfford Still?! She was a huge influence on me and I was so grateful.

It was a period when I kind of floated around. Eventually, I realized that what I was doing was coming out. Everyone goes through huge changes around the age of 19, but I happened to be not straight and I did not realize it. So it was confusing until I left and went to San Francisco and found a culture where it was easier to explore that.

I went to Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and studied with Richard Hawkins and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Bruce Hainley was a huge influence on how I think. Dennis Cooper and I became good friends and he has been a big supporter.

I lived in New York for five years before returning to California. I never imagined I would live in Los Angeles. It was not even an option. I thought as a painter, you have to go to New York, especially since all the artists that I worshiped growing up and in my education were there.

**JS:** *You have a very unique process, of making works that are hybrids of painting and collage, with cut elements from other work organically incorporated into the compositions. Can you discuss your methods?*

**LD-R:** I start off with remnants. The remnants are organized according to material and scale and shape. There is vellum, cardboard, and paper cut from other pieces. I have boxes of triangles; I have boxes of stencils of the triangles – so there are the opposites. They are scraps with potential. They were cut out of one thing, but saved with the intention to be recycled. I will usually imagine a piece made out of certain elements.

The current body of work is about responding to the color and marks that have accumulated on the brown paper protecting my studio floor – the five years' worth of drips and smudges that end up there. I work on the floor and make stencils, so they are not completely incidental marks — it is like a net that I have cast. I am taking that paper up from the floor and cutting it into shapes. Then I combine it with parts from other paintings. Those two things make something new.

I try to minimize layers. So, I cut into the surface of the painting and then paste shapes in from behind. I don't just add layers. I think the cutting is the most unusual thing that I bring to the work, because I cut everything. My X-Acto knife and glue are used more than a brush.



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*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (bl.ppr.bl.trngls.rd.lns.) (detail)" (2013) (photo by J. McLane. Courtesy Gavlak Gallery)*

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Jasper Johns is one of my heroes in terms of the attention he pays to materials in his work. He really pushes them to stand out from one another. The encaustic is so that he can carve into it and create layers and depth. In his Catenary paintings from the early 2000s, he used string and then removed the string from the wax to achieve a leftover, residual line.

I have started to become more involved with each step of the process in the studio and what it means. I feel like it all has to be interesting. There is a lot of work to doing something that is indefinable. There is a lot of preparing. It's very physical. I'm on my hands and knees constantly, more than anything. I consider the endurance involved in doing something repetitive, how your mind gets you through things. I have been walking, hiking, and backpacking a lot lately, and that is why. I realized I needed to exercise or I would hurt myself painting.

**JS:** *Yes, there is a lot of repetition and recurrence in terms of the shapes and forms that make up your work, and the recycling of remnants. Can you talk about the ways repetition is important to you?*

**LD-R:** Repetition is present in every part of my practice, whether it is cutting out shapes or choosing a specific pattern or color that I can't get enough of. I think about the relationship between repetition and desire or pleasure.

I am choosing to make certain things, choosing what I spend my time doing. And because it is so repeated, it becomes pleasurable. Also, if it is not repeated after it has been repeated, it becomes very pleasurable. That's the thing about expectation and building a visual pattern.

It is one reason I love Matisse's work so much — the constant juxtaposition of textiles and repetitious patterns against each other. By doing that, he asks of a lot of a viewer — to discern what is within that flatness, and it works.

**JS:** *You mentioned walking, hiking, and skateboarding. I wonder if these kinds of activities become a metaphor for the kind of repetitive, endurance-based studio practice you have described?*

**LD-R:** Yes, absolutely. There are so many parallels to being in the studio. The idea of moving and movement is the goal. There is no destination that I necessarily want to get to. Like a hike, the painting process is about returning to the place where you began. There is a fluid series of decisions. There has to be an element of risk that was taken, along with a bit of luck, and you need to be able to see that. It has to bear the risk of losing the painting, going too far. But I don't want to see too much denseness, or too many effects of labor. It has to have lightness and an ease.

This year I co-taught a hiking class at California Institute of the Arts with another painter. It's mostly a hiking class. Not everyone is a painter. We talk about geology, patterns in nature, entropy. It becomes very expansive. Studio-based practices can become very closed off and self-centered. We thought this would an opportunity to have students together and discussing things that are important to them, but not insulated.



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*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (crdbd.flr.ppr.rd.trngls.)" (2014), gouache, acrylic, graphite, paper, glue, and cardboard, 52 x 44 1/2 inches (photo by J. McLane. Courtesy Gavlak Gallery)*

1034 North Highland Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90038 T +1 323.467.5700  
249B Worth Avenue, Palm Beach, FL 33480 T +1 561.833.0583 F +1 561.214.4526  
gavlakgallery.com info@gavlakgallery.com

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We are all always on our phones and screens, and the map on our GPS always places us right at the center of our space. Hiking is about going off of that — moving through space so that you are not actually the center of the universe, realizing this thing is larger than us. The idea is to explore so that maybe we can get lost and find out where we are. The hikes are around the school, within half an hour, but there is incredible geology, rock formations, and fossils. It has been developed, but only up to a point, and all of the areas in between are amazing.

**JS:** *Does the landscape play any direct role in the organization or composition of your work?*

**LD-R:** There has always been a relationship to the landscape in my paintings, but not a direct representation of it. I am more interested in a celebration of the event, the careful looking it takes, and the embracement of what that means. I like capturing transformation, movement, shifting color and light, and the rhythm one can achieve while moving or walking. I want to break with the horizon line so the compositions are more dynamic. Diagonal lines move very quickly — quicker than horizontals. It is the same with shapes. Triangles shoot across the surface compared to squares. Colors can function in the same way.

I often walk through Elysian Park, and I love how a tree can look completely different each time I see it. One day it is orange and the next day it is gray, depending on the light and whether a cloud has moved in front of the sun.

The paintings are about the re-negotiation of space, surface, and touch more than they are about representing a familiar space. I am interested in a complex kind of visual that does not just settle into one way of being read. And that is politically driven.

**JS:** *What do you mean by that? How is that political for you?*

**LD-R:** The idea that beauty and abstraction is the opposite of the political — that kind of thinking — is really problematic for me. And hopefully that's something that I can communicate as a professor to my students.

There is a great article by Linda Besemer, "Abstraction: Politics and Possibilities," which tells a history of activist artists who make abstract work. She addresses how they spoke about their work, and how abstraction actually began as a political movement.

The money around abstraction changed it; we lost and forgot about abstraction as a political movement. First it was the money that became associated with the New York School. And we are still dealing with it. Owning an abstract painting has become a signifier for having a lot of money. Think about *Mad Men* — the abstract painting that is installed up in the executive's office.

**JS:** *It is true that Kandinsky and other pioneers of abstraction saw it as a way to engage a wide audience and build a utopian society. For you, what are the politics of abstraction?*

**LDR:** The ambiguity and the non-hierarchical, fluid compositions are related to an idea about being a human being in the world. It is about being a gay artist and not making work that is



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*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (crdbrd.rd.mgnt.trngls.)" (2014), gouache, acrylic, graphite, paper, glue, and cardboard, 39 3/8 x 31 7/8 inches (photo by J. McLane. Courtesy Gavlak Gallery)*



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to you right away. I am interested in paintings that allow me the space to have my own directly about that. The freedom to be able to make work that is not directly tied to my identity is important to me.

I think about non-hierarchal environments. That informs how I make work. If one thing is coming forward too much, you have to balance it by making another area a little louder. My paintings are about a constantly shifting balance.

I love architectural spaces that are non-hierarchal and fluid, like Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, which is meant to be lived throughout the building: interior–exterior, upstairs–downstairs. The glass creates fluidity, and the green section of the cylindrical structure seems to hover against an otherwise black-and-white space. There is also the Schindler House. Rudolph Schindler had a very utopian idea about what architecture can do. He had complete faith in the aesthetic as carrying political power. That is the story behind his work, and I think he's incredibly important.

The ideal is not being required to define oneself as one thing or another, in terms of gender or sexual orientation. That is what I mean by ambiguity: something that is not necessarily explained interpretation. That's the kind of work I want to make. It is also the way I want to be treated and read in the world as a human being.

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*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (yllw.ppr.bl.gry.trngls.)" (2013), acrylic, paper, glue, and tape, 17 5/8 x 15 7/8 inches (photo by Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Lecia Dole-Recio)*



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*Lecia Dole-Recio, "Untitled (rd.ppr.org.spry.mgnt.trngls.)" (2014), acrylic, gouache, spray paint, graphite, paper, glue, 81 7/8 x 68 1/4 inches (photo by J. McLane. Courtesy Gavlak Gallery)*