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J. LOUIS

Scraped into Focus

Painting is most often thought of as the application of paint. But removing paint has its own rewards, as is the case with the artwork of J. Louis, who uses layers of paint—some stacked tall and others scraped away to reveal a soulful underbelly of raw color—to explore the kaleidoscope of emotion that can be found in the human face.

“The face and the human expression are the most important,” he says. “What I like to do is use the elements around the face to draw you in around this solid, abstracted design. One thing that gets lost in a lot of art is that it’s a tool for creating and communicating an idea. To communicate you have to have something familiar that people can relate to, and a person’s face is a perfect place to explore those ideas.”

Louis, who recently made a big move from Chicago to New York City, will be showing new work starting on July 12 at Shain Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina. The show will feature his large-scale paintings that marry abstractly composed shapes and color forms with highly detailed faces rendered with a dreamlike softness.

“All of my paintings, the vast majority of them, are created based on photo shoots with live models. I’ll take those photos and work with them in a computer until it’s the image I want, one I find pleasing,” he says. “From there, it’s lots of prep on my panels

with a linen and a museum-grade adhesive. I find that this creates a unique texture to each work, and not a linen texture, when I scrape away the paint later on I unearth interesting elements. I’ll typically start with the expression to get the right proportions and then the further I get in the more I start removing pieces and repainting, whether that’s leaving an entire garment so it’s just in the background or scraping everything so I leave it bare.”



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Louis says his process doesn't always click into place right away. "It's tricky and it looks really wrong until everything pops into place," he says, adding that he knows he's done when the painting communicates that to him. "It's just a feeling, and you know it when you come to it."

The resulting work is both startling in its simplicity and its design, and also intoxicatingly colorful with large chunks of color—cobalt blues that smell of salt water, plummy purples of subdued brilliance and a yellow that can be seen from orbit—that are sandwiched around peaceful feminine figures with detailed faces. *Electric Disposition* features a figure seemingly floating over four blocks of raw and abstracted paint scraped down to the very foundation of the painting.

Tsunami features a figure, arms outstretched, amid two mesmerizing shades of blue. The artist, who says he's heavily inspired by Gustav Klimt and Antonio Mancini, created the surface she's laying against with a single brushstroke across the entire canvas.

With all the work, the viewer is seeing paint that is there and paint that was there—past and present rendered around the human form. "I love playing with materials, so much that I don't think of myself as a traditional painter, but more a materials expert," he says. "I just love playing with the three-dimensionality of paint." ●

Shain Gallery 2823 Selwyn Avenue, Suite K • Charlotte, NC 28209
(704) 334-7744 • www.shaingallery.com

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Tsunami, oil on linen-mounted cradled panel, 48 x 48"

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Elevation, oil on linen-mounted cradled panel, 35 x 35"

3
Electric Disposition, oil on linen-mounted cradled panel, 40 x 52"

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J. Louis painting *The Bridge*, oil on linen-mounted cradled panel, 60 x 60"