

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Kufer, Katrina. 'A Modern History.' *AlSerka/Avenue*. (December 2018).



ART



## A MODERN HISTORY

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New York-based artist Nancy Lorenz spent her formative years living in Japan, an experience that deeply impacted her artistic language. “It was in Japan I realised I wanted to become an artist,” she says. “Everything I saw there, from the sublime craft to the flower arranging—I kept going back to it.”

Moved by the level of craftsmanship and restraint exercised in the Japanese aesthetic, Lorenz has spent her artistic career honing her usage of mother-of-pearl inlay, lacquer and gold leaf in her large-scale, gilded abstract works. “Visual depth is really important to me, and over the last 30 years, I’ve been finding ways to make the works take longer,” she adds. “As I get older, my pieces become more demanding and I realised it’s a way to make things take longer to produce, but with that, it also takes a little longer to look at them.”

Lorenz’s works are delicately and intricately layered in their immersive proportions. She admits that *Silver Moon’s* collection of silver, blue, and gold-toned works may not exude the same degree of restraint as her Japanese inspirations—the result of exposure to Western art movements during her years in the US, where she earned a BFA Summa Cum Laude in Painting and Printmaking at the University of Michigan, and an MFA in Painting from the Tyler School of Art.

“My practice was also shaped by Abstract Expressionism,” she explains. “There’s a divergence there. There’s abstraction. But on the other hand, the way I arrange space is influenced by things I saw in Japan. In *Big Rock Garden Room* (2007) you can see my whole vocabulary—a bamboo garden, rock garden, how the concentric circles imply sand. It is just years of looking at and referencing Japanese elements.”

Fusing influences appears in Lorenz’s practice in more ways than through the imagery. Constantly exploring new methods of combining her glimmering materials and Japanese motifs, she notes that engaging a framework of chemical elements

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produces endless new strings of combinations. “Lately I’ve focused on combining ordinary materials—I get very seduced by the glittery, the gold, the pearl, the silver, all those reflective materials, but I’ve had this desire to use more everyday materials. It’s a way of keeping things fresh,” she explains.

The use of cardboard appears in *Moon Gold Mountain* (2018), a technique that she picked up during a residency in Ireland years prior and results in a more visceral visual effect. “Different parts of the corrugation become illuminated, and that is very interesting to me,” she says. In keeping with the juxtaposition of earthier materials, Lorenz reveals that a couple of the works she displayed at the Abu Dhabi Art fair, which took place in November, likewise embraced this contrast, where she uses wood grain with raised gilt motifs to interesting effect.

But the works are more than gently glistening landscapes hinting at Asian iconographies and executed with ancient tradition. “I often talk so much about the Japan reference, but there is an interest in science throughout my work and the idea of macro-micro patterning,” she says. Spending time in Paris in the early 1990s, Lorenz caught the attention of a small group of artists who were part of the Fractalism movement, following her project enabled by the reception of a 1998 artist grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. The work consisted of producing a poetic interpretation of each of the elements from the Periodic Table, a work she revisited in 2003. “It was that work that caught the attention of the Fractalist Group. They invited me to participate in their group as I was working with it quite a bit then,” she adds, noting that it continues to play a role in her practice.

There are conceptual levels to Lorenz’s work that complement the dense imagery and layers upon layers—up to 60—of media that build the textured surfaces which organically flow across her canvases. “I’ve always wanted to make beautifully crafted immersive paintings that you can get lost in,” she says. “That’s where the scale comes in. Depending on where you’re standing, different parts are illuminated and you can be encapsulated by this dream landscape.”

But she asserts it is more than decorative, automatic interpretation. “I don’t want it to just be a finely crafted piece. It has to have a transcendent, emotional quality to it, which is where my training in Abstract Expressionism comes through. I don’t let anything out of the studio that doesn’t have heart.”

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