



MARIA BRITO

CAROLINE LARSEN'S POOLS, HOUSES, MOUNTAINS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

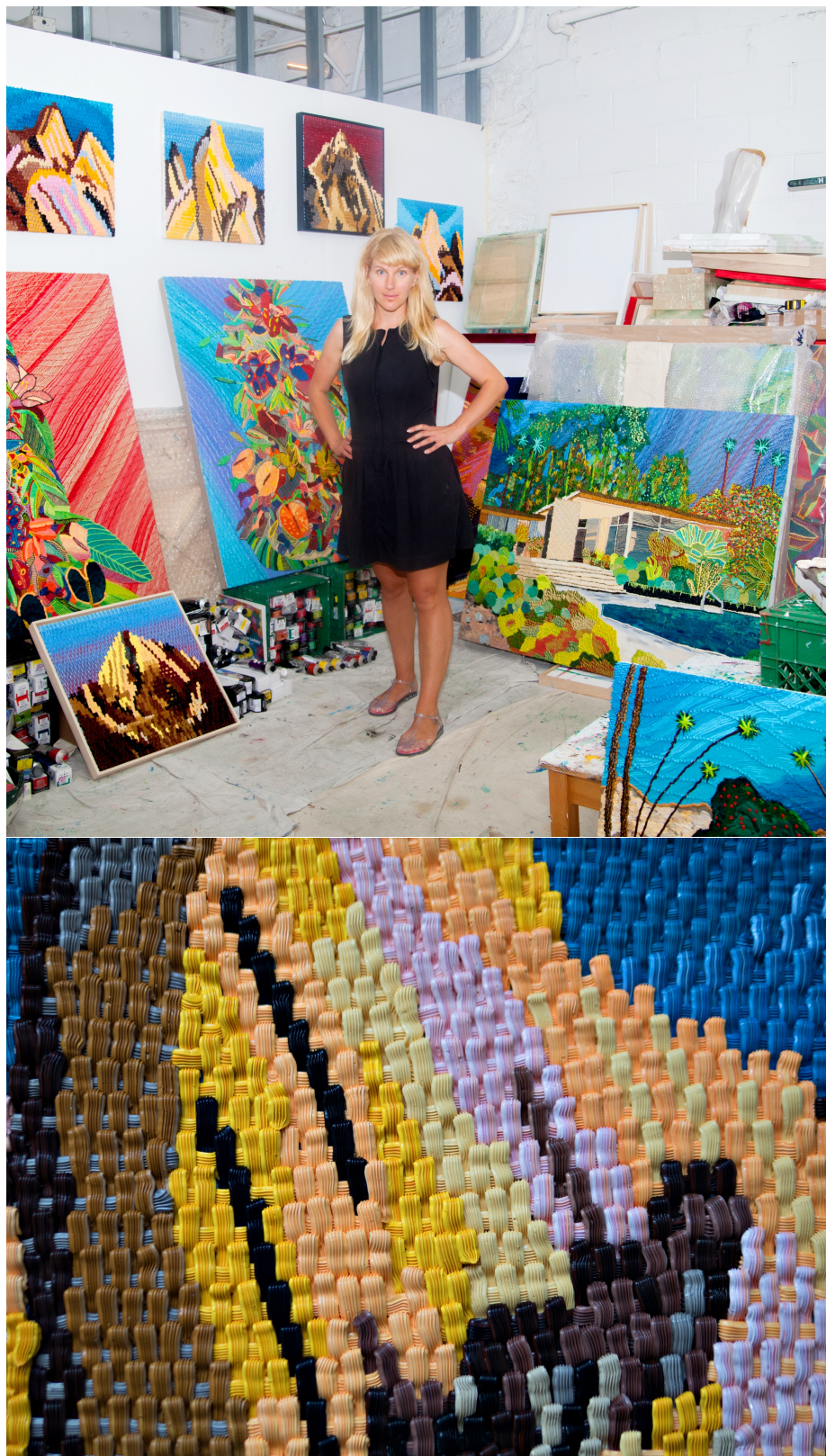
September 11, 2017



It's a scorching hot day in August and the smell of fresh oil paint inside [Caroline Larsen's](#) new Brooklyn studio is as fantastic as it is overwhelming. "I don't feel it anymore", Caroline tells me, which I can totally understand, since five minutes after being fully immersed in her world, I no

longer do either. Plus, the visual stimulation of having dozens of canvases filled with the most saturated colors and layered textures definitely subordinates any olfactory sense to a second plane, bringing the visual and tactile sense forward (and if these works could be edible, I would have certainly tried to taste them too). Her paintings look like embroideries, sometimes like beaded works, needle point or crochet. They are accomplished by extruding paint through confectionery bags with different tips to create a variety of textures. A unique take on traditional painting techniques is something that I'm always on the lookout for: how are these young artists moving painting forward? What are they bringing to our times that we hadn't seen before? How fresh and innovative is their work? Caroline's techniques are checking those boxes for me.

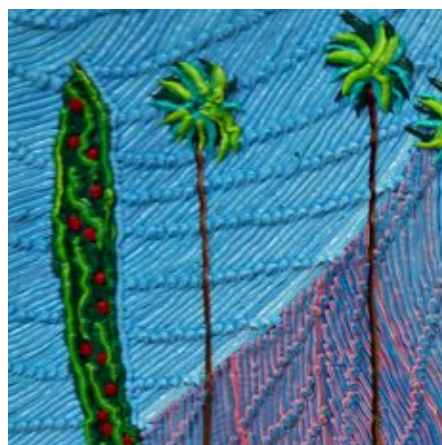
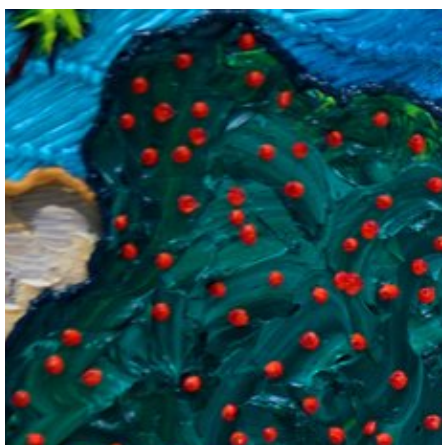




Caroline was born in Toronto but moved to Florida when she was around nine years old. [She started art school as a ceramicist](#), where in her first year she checked the

work of some second-year students and noticed somebody had made a wedding cake using extruded paint. That caused a spark in her brain, but it wasn't until a year after, when she had to get her wisdom teeth removed, that she saw herself surrounded by syringes, which became new tools to try on. An assignment to work on a collage with thick paint is how she began exploring what would become the technique that is now so characteristic of her work. Drawing inspiration by [Chris Ofili](#), the idea of putting dots on everything has also informed her practice, hence the thick dots on her work that sometimes become lines or sometimes become waves. The syringes were replaced by confectionery bags and she has been deeply exploring, almost obsessively, this technique since 2009. The canvas are stretched over panels

because of the sheer amount of paint that she uses on each of them. They take a long time to dry, about a month in the summer and probably two months or more in the winter. Caroline says sometimes she feels that the paintings are crawling on her - and rightly so, as they contain so much liveliness, power and movement.



Flower paintings can be so cliché and kitschy but not in

Caroline's hands; where it becomes a multicolor riot of saturated hues with the deepest of textures, each one so different and so special. And then there is her series of mountains, which look like needlepoint yarn, to the extent that when I first saw one, I had to touch it to understand what it was made of: layers of extruded oil paint placed in orderly lines that form a lattice pattern, whose extra added texture comes from the tip of the confectionery bag. But her houses and pools series are my favorites. I love the fact that background and forefront are so very intense; they aren't competing but are on equal planes. This series has cultural implications and ramifications that are connected to wealth and the search of the American Dream plus the sociological implications of these houses. Caroline became interested in the narrative of

the American Dream and researched images on real estate ads, magazines, newspapers, finding the ones in Palm Spring to be the most compelling.

California is always around us, with desserts and hills, with Hollywood and movie stars, on TV and everywhere else. These houses have no entrance and no people around, it is really a dream. And the pools are always associated with success, with being rich.

Coincidentally a few days prior, a friend of mine told me that his dad, a man who escaped the Cuban revolution in the 60s and moved to Miami with nothing, told everyone that they all had made it in the United States because he and each of his kids had a house with a pool in the yard





Caroline had a very successful solo show at [The Hole](#) this past spring, and has two upcoming solos in the fall: one in Santa Monica at the [Craig Krull Gallery](#) and one at [Gordon Gallery](#) in Tel Aviv. Although the speed with which she's becoming sought-after doesn't really match the speed that it takes her work to dry, Caroline is prolifically creating stunning paintings in her studio and enthralling

the senses of those lucky
enough to be in front of one.



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CAROLINE LARSEN





Caroline in her studio! Photo credit: The Morrisons

Caroline Larsen lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She has an undergraduate degree from the University of Waterloo and a Masters of Fine Arts degree from Pratt Institute. Larsen's work has been in numerous group shows throughout Canada, America and Germany. She has been the recipient of grants from the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council, she has received Merit Based Scholarship and the Calrow Memorial Scholarship to study at Pratt Institute.

Artist Statement:

Statement for the more abstract works, Midnight Cove, Night Tropics, Breaking Night, Night Vines:

Using the memory of landscapes and imagery that I experienced during my upbringing in Sarasota, Florida as a springboard I create images that evoke a celebratory tropical frenzy. My interest in tropical landscapes stems from my lived experience, growing up in Florida and spending time in Panama as an adult has greatly influenced my aesthetic.

This work explores the sensation of being in the tropical landscape at night, when the heat exaggerates the saturation of the night hues. These paintings also start to play with the idea of abstraction. The paintings, I hope, coexist between a recognizable form and a nonrepresentational image, but at the same time they are pictorial; in these works I am interested in the in-between.

My backgrounds, rather than being passive, actively compete with the flora image. I heighten this tension by using, contrasting vibrant color along with a rich material density. The image is knitting together by cable like brushstrokes, but the activity of the color breaks the surface plane.

A constant focus of all of my work, is the attentiveness to color and its role of imparting feeling. My paint application, with its texture acting as line and pattern, is an organizing form in and of itself; the ridges cast shadows and create optical rhythms. The paintings use a full color palette, keeping with my intention to be as ornamental and vibrant as possible.

Statement for the houses and pool paintings:

These are paintings of suburban warm-weather homes. Locations vary from California, the Southwest and Florida. I use a slightly off-kilter perspective in these works to push and pull the viewer's eyes around the canvas, enveloping them in a world that is specific but also surreal. They are specific because the houses that I have painted exist, I could travel to them if I wished. Using images sourced from landscaping blogs and real estate listings, these canvases depict the commercial ideal associated with personal success in America. Using a variety of painterly tools and techniques, I am extruding paint through bags, creating surface texture using combs and sponges alongside with brush and palette knife application.

Artist Interview

Hi Caroline! You are currently an MFA candidate at Pratt, when will you graduate?

I am graduating this Friday! May the 15th.

So far in 2015 you have had four solo exhibitions and been a part of eight group exhibitions. Congratulations! How do you balance your exhibition schedule and your school schedule?

Thanks! Two of the solo shows are upcoming, so they won't clash with my school schedule, *Night Tropics* was my thesis exhibition, so that was a school requirement! My school program revolves around my artwork, I think, or thought, of them as all part of the same practice. Plus I make my husband help me with moving them and shipping them! Having a helper makes everything so much easier!

You have been very successful at getting involved in the art scene and exhibiting your work in a gallery setting! A lot of students struggle with the transition from student to working artist and getting their work out there. Can you talk a little bit about how you have been able to make this happen? Do you have any advice for recent grads?

I have been so lucky that people have been responding to my work! I think the best advice for people going to grad school, is don't go right after undergrad, give yourself a few years to figure stuff out, and make work on your own, then when you start to feel stuck then start applying for grad school! It's been such an amazing experience for me, being totally

absorbed in making, talking and looking at art! I think its been so great because I took took such a huge break from undergrad to graduate studies, I think if you do that you can take full advantage of the grad school experience.

You mention in your statement that you are interested in the tension that is created as the background and the foreground compete. I am fascinated by the rhythm created in your paintings on so many levels—from the textures and dimensionality of the paint, to the patterns and colors, to representation and abstraction. What interests you most about rhythms in the world around us?

I think about the way the light moves on the water, and how textile fabrics work together or don't work together. Everything is always moving. I wanted the paintings in the *Night Tropics* exhibition to have rhythm, like a pulse. They are inspired by being outside in the foliage at night when its sweltering out—to me, all the colors seem darker and richer, like the heat adds a massive amount of saturation to the surroundings.

Your paintings are beautiful, and so unique—and you must use a lot of paint! How did you begin working with the medium in this way? What are some of the challenges?

Thanks! I have always had a heavy hand when applying paint! In undergrad I starting playing around with squeezing paint from a bag. I had my wisdom teeth removed and the dentist had given me plastic syringes, and I started to squeeze paint out of those too! I loved the topographical feeling that the paintings took on. Now my paintings are quite thin in paint application, in comparison to my older work! Waiting for paint to dry has always been a drag!

Have you experimented with other materials and what keeps you coming back to oil paint as your medium of choice?

During my graduate studies I spent a lot of time making ceramics—I wanted to make the 3-D versions of my paintings! I tried working with acrylic paint in the past, but it doesn't have the same luster of oils. Over the summer I will be without a studio for about 2 months, so I am planning of working with colored pencils in my apartment.

Can you talk a little bit about the tools and techniques you use to create texture?

Right now I only use a bag, but before when I was making the paintings in the *Curb Appeal* show, I was using squeegees, sponges, brushes, scrapers and palette knives.

What do you listen to while you work? Any music or podcasts we should check out?

I love podcasts, I listen to them when I paint! My favorites are: *Stuff You Should Know*, its totally cheesy, but it really cracks me up; *The Bugle*, which is John Oliver's podcast and its hilarious. I also like the *Slate Spoilers*, I never go to the movies, so I just listen to these folks tell me the whole story line! I also love *RadioLab*, *99% Invisible*, *This American Life*, *Modern Art Notes*, *Bad a Sports*, *Planet Money*, and *Freaknomics*. I don't usually listen to music when I work, I run so I like to save the music for my jogs!

Are there a few artists whose work you are currently looking at?

Chris Ofili is my favorite artist right now, I think you can see the influence on my work! I love Peter Shire and Yayoi Kusama! I also look at the work of Gina Beavers, Trudy Benson, Robert Otto Epstein, Jonathan Lasker, Tal R, Michael Berryhill, Michael Staniak and probs a million other artists! I love going to the MET and looking at the ceramics!

Anything else you would like to share about you or your work?

I have some upcoming shows! This summer in Toronto I am having a solo show called *Tropical Blooms* at General Hardware on Queen Street in Parkdale. The opening will be in July, but I am unsure of the date just yet. In September I

am showing my mountain paintings for the first time at the *Craig Krull Gallery* in Santa Monica, which I am super excited about!

We can't wait to see them! Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us! Good luck with your shows this summer and congrats on graduation!

To find out more about Caroline and her work, visit the artist's **website**.

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METAL



CAROLINE LARSEN

PAINT OR TEXTILE?

Caroline Larsen is a Toronto-based artist, currently living in Brooklyn while finishing her studies, whose work blends pixilated neo-impressionism with the idea of a tapestry. It is only when you take a closer look at her paintings that you realize they aren't huge woven textiles but rather drawings composed by thick daubs of oil paint. This gives her work a sense of folklore that completely contradicts the themes she chooses, varying from burning cars to Kate Middleton and Prince William's wedding kiss. She is about to make her thesis exhibition, *Night Tropics*, this April at the Pratt Institute of Brooklyn.

When someone sees your paintings, they instantly want to touch them if not grab them because they seem to be textiles although they are not, right? Describe the process of making one of your paintings.

Right. They are oil paintings. I usually take about a month to plan a painting, I do internet searches and observational research, gathering images, color ideas and general sensibility of what I am going to paint, the painting is a stand-in for the idea or feeling, so I like to start with a strong thought foundation. Right now I am painting flowers, but they are more like foliage at night, like when you are running around in the summer heat and it's dark out. I grew up in Florida and I have vivid memories of deep green plants that seemed so saturated in the summer heat. There is a great street in New York that is lined with shops selling bouquets and succulents and near my house in Brooklyn there are the Botanical Gardens. I like going there to see the variety of color combinations! In my studio I keep a collection of house plants too, for quick reference.

How did you come up with this form? Was there any initial inspiration, because they seem to have something folkloric about them? They remind me of the rags my grandmother used to hang on the wall.

Inspiration for my paintings comes from day to day. I try to get out and see a lot of art and I love looking at textiles and patterns. I love that you think of them as having a "folklore aesthetic." I am so interested in folk, craft and outsider art and I think those influences come through in some of my mark-making.

On the one hand you seem to follow more of a folklore aesthetic and on the other we see burning cars. Could you explain the range of your inspiration? Where do these ideas come from?

I draw much of my inspiration from the past, I will recall a specific memory and try to express that in my paintings. My previous body of work, the Palm Flora show at Mulherin in New York, was all about bright, vibrant, ornamental colors and compositions: orange birds of paradise and acidic pink orchids were reminiscent of mid 90's Floridian kitsch.

You've mentioned in other interviews that you like working with music at your studio. Could you tell us your top three songs to listen to while you work?

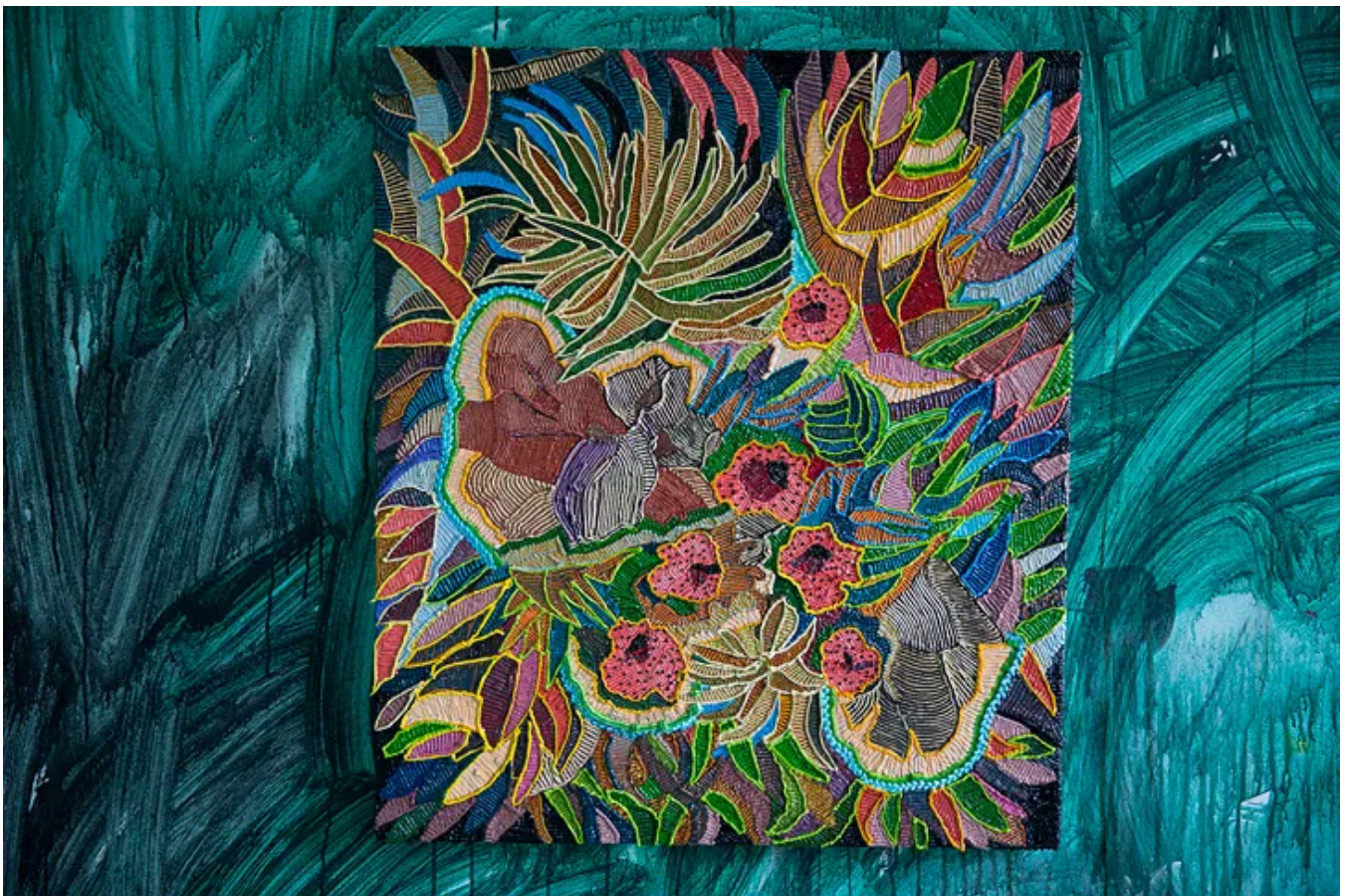
I have stopped listening to music while I work. I am now all about the podcasts. I love all of the really popular podcasts, like This American Life and Radiolab, but also listen to Modern Art Notes, Bad at Sports, Stuff you Should Know and my favorite, The Bugle! Music-wise, I love dance music.

What are we going to see at *Night Tropics*? Are you excited about your new exhibition?

Night Tropics is going to be my thesis exhibition, it opens April 1st, at the Pratt Institute Brooklyn campus. I am excited about it because it is the beginning of the conclusion of my Masters of Fine Arts degree! So it's both really exciting and really scary to be finishing up school. I am planning on painting the walls of the gallery and trying to make a more immersive environment for the paintings. I am in a larger gallery that is divided into three sections so my studio mates, Matt Kelberg and Lesley Peterson will be exhibiting alongside me, and that's really exciting for all of us to share the experience together.

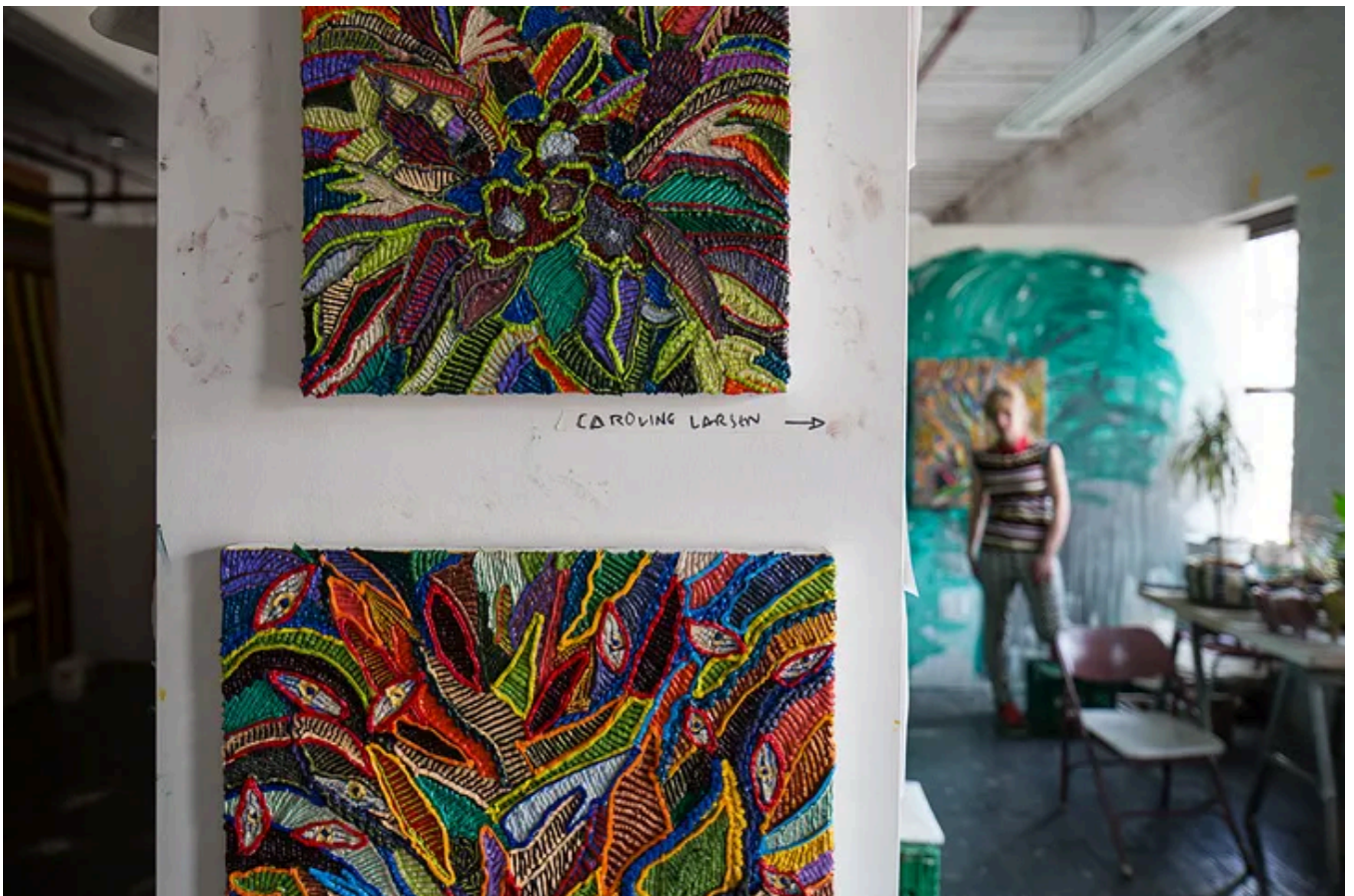
How was 2014 in terms of creativity and how do you feel these first three months of the year have been? For you, is 2015 a year full of new collaborations, creation and passion for painting, and maybe traveling?

I think that 2014 and 2015 have been really good to me creatively. Having the exhibition at Mulherin New York in December was a great milestone for my paintings and being in school has been really wonderful.









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