



# Sarah Lutz

## AND THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

By Jan Lhormer

SARAH LUTZ is one of those fortunate painters who follow in the long tradition of artists who are devoted to a rigorous studio practice in New York City during the year and migrate to creative meccas in Truro and Provincetown for the summer. And the influences that led her to this path were introduced at an early age. Teachers from her Connecticut boarding school guided Lutz's artistic path by recommending summer high-school classes at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), as well as lessons at Truro's Center for the Arts at Castle Hill with legendary mentors Jim Peters and Paul Bowen. Lutz's family tree includes painters, potters, and architects who bestowed a legacy of work that encouraged her early immersion into art.

Lutz was born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1967, but her father's career as a historian led the family abroad to Guatemala when she was nine years old, and this experience with Latin culture left impressions of exotic colors, patterns, processions, and perfumes that infused her canvases. Lutz also credits the coastal landscape by her Truro home and studio as influencing the watery surfaces and sea anemone-like forms that inhabit the illusive space of the paintings. She treasures time on Cape Cod, but craves the vibrancy and opportunities of New York for the off-season.

Last January, I had the pleasure of visiting Sarah Lutz in her Lower East Side studio, just north of the burgeoning LES gallery scene. She had recently moved in to the studio, and it retained the orderliness

one might expect from a newly inhabited space. A vast array of paint tubes and pigments lined a table, and an adjacent cart held a glass palette (dollops of oil paint freshly mixed), squeegees, cake-decorating tools, spray cans, and a brush collection, including a particularly unique multi-bristle tool from Paris. Spirograph and stenciling materials and bottles of glazing medium rested in a back storage area. Lutz has an insatiable love of process, materials, and discovery, which is integral to the multifaceted subject matter in her work. "I have become increasingly interested in creating varied, exuberant, and almost opulent environments within the paintings," she explained. "But the transition has been organic and gradual, combining many methods and materials and colors all together: synthetic and organic color;

impasto and thin veils of glaze along with spray paint, stencils, glitter, paper balls."

The left studio wall held a stunning medley of nineteen small paintings, evidence of her virtuoso use of color and composition, which conjures images of tropical locales. Spinning biomorphic forms within an aquatic haze are contrasted by ordered patterns from tile floors or other geometric configurations. In the center panel, one painting, *Rapture*, suggests a horizon bathed in deep scarlet reds. A pink burst of phosphorescent critters occupies the foreground, while small greenish circles rise—or fall—from the sky. The painting engages all of the senses through syrupy color, jeweled surfaces, clashing rhythms, balancing abstraction and inventive elements with references to the observed



*Rapture*, 2014, oil, polymer resin, paper balls, and spray paint on linen, 48 by 36 inches  
(opposite page) Studio wall with nineteen paintings PHOTO BY JOSÉ PICAYO

world. She reflected on the transition in her work: “I started moving away from the more naturalistic, or even ‘Old World’ color palette in the mid-’90s. At the same time, I began experimenting with a wider range of materials and methods of both applying and removing paint.”

Another area of the studio revealed pristinely wrapped monoprints just returned from the Art Basel art fair in Miami, where she was represented in an exhibition sponsored by Provincetown’s Schoolhouse Gallery, and director Mike Carroll. Lutz values printmaking in its own right, but also as a means to develop new and unexpected ideas for paintings. Since 2006, she has worked with master printer Marina Ancona, the founder of 10 Grand Press in Brooklyn, New York. By layering transparent veils of ink poured over cut shapes of mylar, Lutz explores design and imagery while happening upon intriguing color possibilities. The smaller paintings on wooden boards are also breeding grounds for motifs or techniques that might find their way to a larger stage of stretched linen on canvas.

Along the back central wall, eight dazzling 48 by 36 inch canvases awaited completion for an upcoming one-person show at Mercy Gallery in Windsor, Connecticut. In this body of work, adept layers of floating orb-like shapes exist within a

sugary color palette. In *Claret*, flat anthropomorphic forms and patterns created through stenciling and spirograph techniques add weight within a disorienting, ethereal world. Imagery shifts toward body or mind associations, and less toward landscape. Lutz muses that she was likely inspired by her daughter’s ballet performances, referring to the theatrical compositions on canvas as choreographed dancers within a stage. The show’s title, *Tales from the Garden and Other Mythologies*, invites a narrative quality to the sequence of canvases, which Lutz views as a stop-action comic or graphic novel. Her ongoing dialogue with a virtual garden of earthly delights encompasses all that the artist loves: candy, jewels, summertime, motherhood, cooking, painting, and visual excess.

Since earning a master of fine arts degree from American University in 1992, Lutz has identified with abstract painting. Now a mid-career artist, she has earned recognition through solo exhibitions at New York City’s Lohin Geduld Gallery, Kevin Rita’s Brick Walk Fine Art in West Hartford, and Provincetown’s esteemed Schoolhouse Gallery, where her work will be featured in a show this summer.

Artists who have influenced her include Expressionist greats Jake Berthot and John Walker, who visited Lutz’s studio while she was in graduate school.




*Claret*, 2014, oil on linen, 16 by 12 inches

She refers to their critiques as “life-changing” for the validation and wisdom they provided. Philip Guston is another strong influence, as is evident through her joy in combining cartoon-like piles of symbolic forms within a conceptual space, but Lutz has achieved her own dizzying, contemporary point of view. She cites an affinity with Dutch still-life painters of excess and opulence, yet has no kinship with their moralistic portents over the futilities of earthly pleasures. A true painter’s painter, political caveats elude her. Her content involves the viewer on a sensual level, beckoning varying associations, without social commentary. ❌

*JAN LHORMER is an oil painter, art professor, and arts writer living in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Her work is included in Deborah Forman’s newly released book, Contemporary Cape Cod Artists: On Abstraction, which also features the art of Sarah Lutz. For more information, go to [www.janlhormer.com](http://www.janlhormer.com).*

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