

BROOKLYN RAIL

Marilyn Lerner: *Walking Backward Running Forward—Again*

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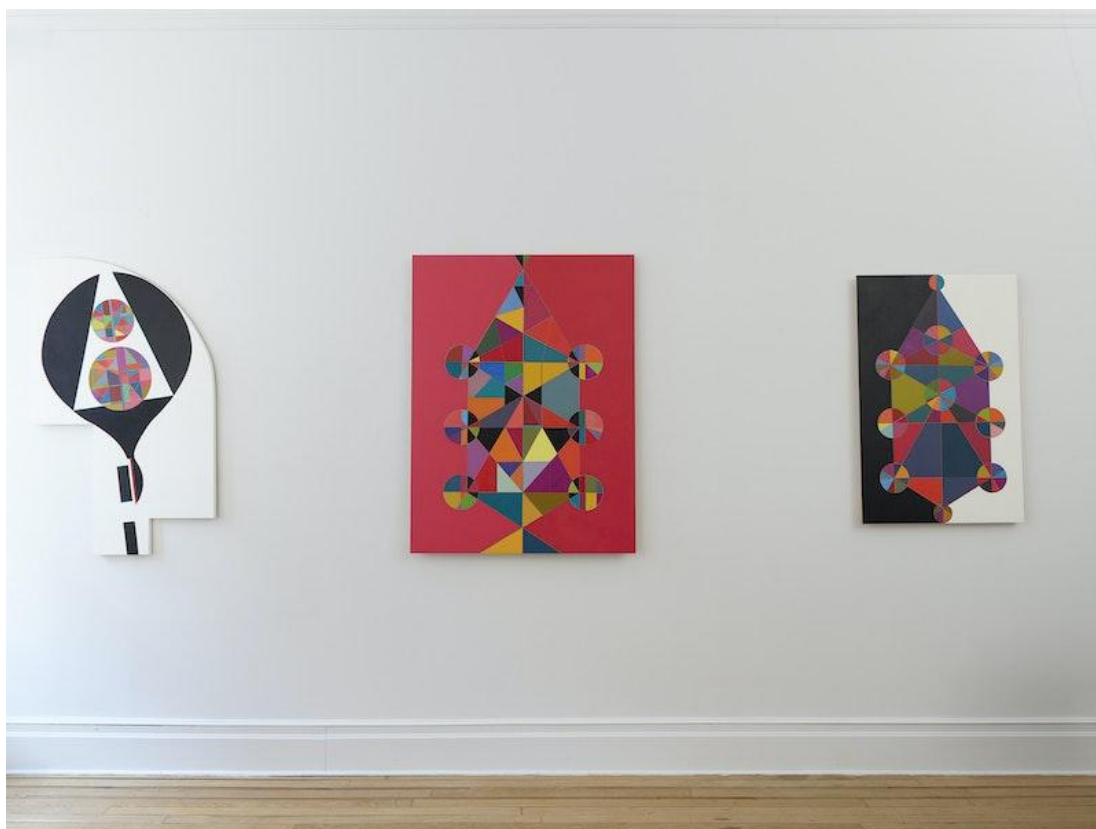
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Marilyn Lerner, *Dido Dreaming of Carthage*, 2021. Oil on wood panel 36 × 36 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein.

The eight paintings presented here were completed this year, but they are the product of up to three years' work, subsequent to Marilyn Lerner's last exhibition with Kate Werble in 2018 at the gallery's old space in Tribeca. The genesis of two of these paintings (*By The Sea* [2021] and *Dido Dreaming of Carthage* [2021]) was from works on paper made during the summer of 2019 at the BAU Institute Residency in Cassis, France. Typically, all of Lerner's paintings are mapped out on paper first, beginning with pencil drawing and then gouache color; these works on paper are rough approximations of the paintings that follow—they are never in any case "studies" to replicate in the traditional sense, though they are necessary for the anticipation of the custom-made wooden panel supports. Take, for example, *Dido Dreaming of Carthage*, a 36 by 36-inch oil painted on wooden panel. The finished painting is a far more complex proposition, evolved intuitively with daring and precision. The symmetry of its design exists as a perimeter outline of the doubled structures after which the

colors—cerulean, reds, yellows, greens, pinks—and shapes within interlock in improvised transitions that reflect each other like passages of light: never the same, always pushing difference to the limit like a physically demanding dance movement. The pink ground color that surrounds the doubled shape is itself a field of optical shifting tone, present also within the double shape making the structures open, and porous figures moving before a screen, partially dissolving into it but never disappearing. The paintings are incredibly tactile—each individual layer of color has a border with the next, and some are ridges that would be easily felt if (and please don't) fingers were gently passed over the surface. This built quality, an embodied time, together with constant color interactions—Albers would have been mesmerized as much as the rest of us—effect an ecstatic kinesthetic experience.



Installation view: Marilyn Lerner: *Walking Backward Running Forward—Again*, Kate Werble Gallery, New York 2021. Courtesy the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein.

A consideration of the nature of time becomes inevitable. The mutable silhouette of form (some of the paintings themselves are shaped, irregularly proportioned forms) and permutations of color demand from the eye an acknowledgement of irresistible movement observed and felt by the viewer in a myriad of ways—perceptually, physically, psychologically, spiritually. These challenge any notion of a simple linearity bound in one direction. Color has an emotional resonance for Lerner; she has noted that the meaning and reception of color changes geographically and historically over time. The paintings are physically static objects, but that's where any stasis ends. *By the Sea's* title is perhaps a reference to the town of Cassis where Lerner was staying in 2019, itself by the sea. A triangle of mosaic color is enfolded in adjacent and partially overlapping black rectangles; a triangular section of white wall is visible which connects this painting to others here that use white areas to emphasize the shape of the paintings and its dual relation—to the wall on which it hangs

as well as the internal configuration of the paintings' composition.



Marilyn Lerner, *By The Sea*, 2021. Oil on wood panel 32 × 38 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein

All the paintings explore the inseparable relationship between an intuitive geometry and its chroma, though this is not in any way a purely formal exploration; as in music, like Javanese gamelan and Algerian Rai—a fusion of Bedouin and popular music—that Lerner is often listening to, cyclical repetitions interweave and repeat themes in mesmerizing combinations. The radiant, strong color that entered the artist's paintings in the last decade continues here, manifested after her discovery of Rai music, when, as she says, her "palette exploded." Lerner's aim has been to "make paintings that reflect the sound of the music." She continues to do just this and much more in her latest paintings.