

# EAST CITY ART



## East City Art Interviews: Academy 2013 artist Laura Payne

Published: July 9, 2013



Synopsis I. Acrylic on panel. 36" x 36". 2012. Photo courtesy of CONNERSMITH

The heat of summer has just kicked in which means it is time for CONNERSMITH's annual Academy show. Like its predecessors, Academy 2013 highlights some of the most exciting works of recent graduates from the region's plethora of fine arts programs. Included in this year's exhibition is MICA graduate Laura Payne who deftly explores the intersection of paint and video in works that CONNERSMITH director Jamie Smith describes as "visually stunning... explor[ing] vital questions of practice and autonomy that confront the art of painting at this moment." I caught up with her recently via Skype in her native Canada to find out more about her work. This dynamic intermixing of painting and film started towards the end of her undergraduate years when she enrolled in video classes to augment her painting studies. Mixing more traditional painting with cutting-edge isn't an easy dynamic to master, but Payne takes a very *can-do* attitude towards her work. "People don't allow them to interact easily," she tells me, but in her world neither component can exist without the other.



Public Domain I. 59 seconds. Single channel video. 2011.

Payne has, in just a few short years, created a complex oeuvre examining the "performance" aspect(s) of our interpersonal relationships. In bodies of work such as *Public Domain* (2011), *Candor* (2012) and *Talk to Strangers* (2012), this examination tests the boundaries of what she coins "authentic relationships" between media celebrities and their fan base. Utilizing snippets of talk-show videos (where conversations are seemingly spontaneous but often plotted out far in advance), Payne creates complex narratives that question the depths and limits of celebrities' personal personas. Accompanying these crafted videos are portrait paintings in which the faces of the celebrities are shown askew, distorted or covered over with paint, highlighting the disconnect between their personal worlds and our public perception of them. Her studies in these "authentic relationships" also recognize the passage of time as a crucial puzzle piece, as demonstrated in her series of works titled *Spectacular* (2011) and *Before/After* (2012). These works focus the viewers' eyes on canvases painted to mimic the effects of 3D video (complete with 3D glasses available for use), highlighting the effects of the passage of time on the model's visage.



Do you speak all those languages? 20" x 24". Acrylic and colored pencil on panel. 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Given this rather cohesive body of work, *Synopsis I* and *WYSIWYG*, the works scheduled to appear in Academy 2013, at first glimpse feel like a grand departure. In her latest series of work (also titled *Synopsis*), recognizable portraits are discarded for more austere, almost minimalist paintings utilizing bands of horizontal color. But beware: first appearances can be deceiving, Payne explains. Here the artist uses the process of slit-scan photography to take one vertical point within a film still and stretch it out horizontally, divorcing it of context and reducing it to a form of pure color. This band of color is painted onto a wooden plank up to eight feet long and three feet thick. Planks are then grouped upon a wall based on relative positions within the original film still to create paintings (such as *Synopsis I*) or combined with video projections to create a far more ephemeral mixed-media work. Some works cling to the traditional shape of a canvas or film still, while in others the planks form jagged crags along both sides of the picture frame. In these especially dynamic works, Payne attempts to break with convention and perhaps confound the viewer a bit, challenging expectations of how a painting is “supposed” to look.

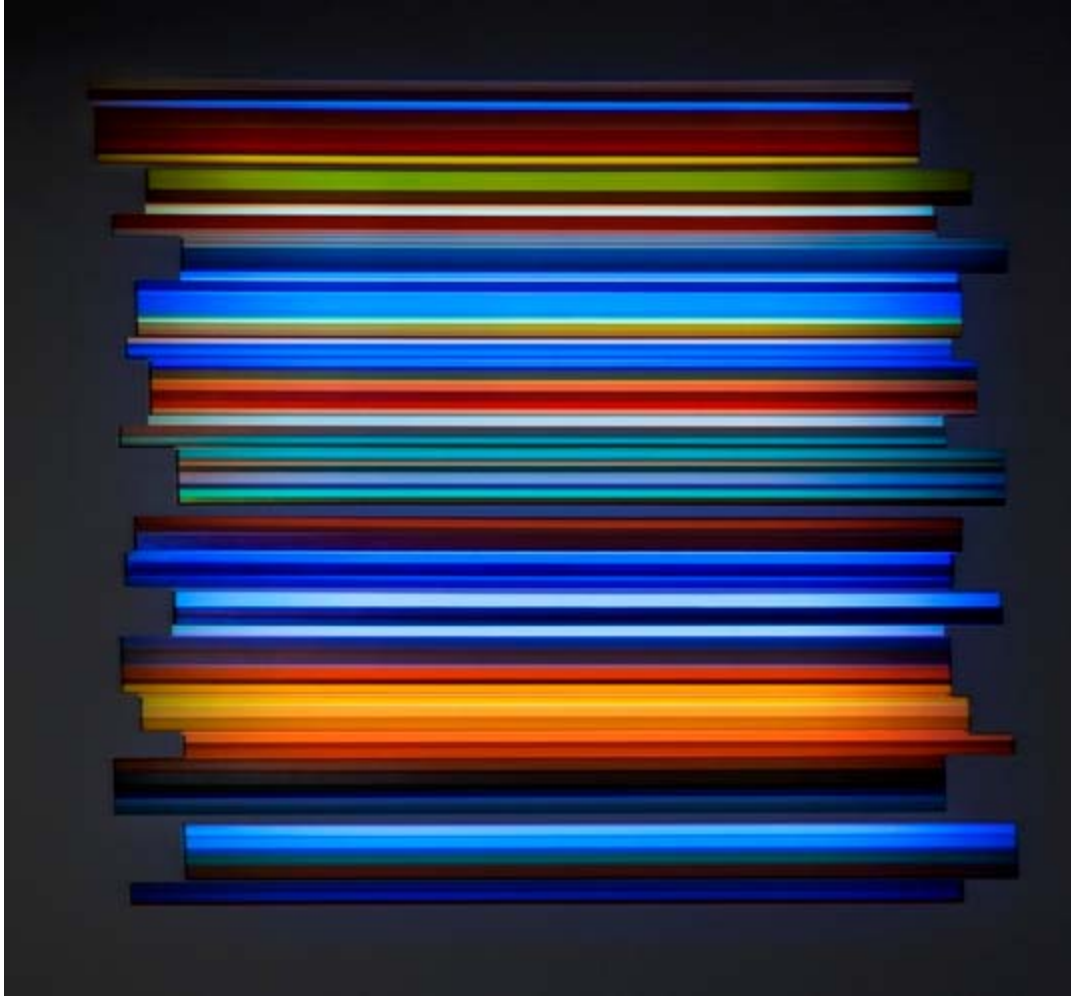


Don't let me stand in your way . Mapped projection, acrylic on wood. 144" x 112". 2013. Photo courtesy of the artist.

While *Synopsis I* is an impressively crafted piece, my bet is that *WYSIWYG* will be the work that garners viewers' lengthy attention with its dynamic interplay of color and light, underscoring her belief that video and painting create their own symbiosis. With *WYSIWYG*, Payne marries a slit-scan produced painting with a matching video work projected on top. The planks are first mounted onto the gallery wall then Payne creates the video component on site (which in this case is a recreation of the same hues in video form) that slowly scrolls over the mounted planks, creating an almost site-specific work. The effect is mesmerizing: the planks seem almost neon-infused and the color tones subtly change as the video slowly progresses through its cycle. Just as viewers are lulled into a zen-like state of calm, the colors in the video suddenly align with the same colored planks on the wall, the momentary intensity of which dazzles our eyes much the way that first full glimmer of the morning sun at the crack of dawn delights our senses.

Sunbursts aside, these works are subtle and without the textual clues of her earlier works they take a few moments to grasp; that is precisely her intention. By discarding obvious reference points, the viewer is left simply

to gaze – to contemplate – to allow the mind to wander in free association. In these “time-based projections mapping [in]to paintings,” (her term) Payne skillfully toys with the very nature of color itself, noting that our eyes can differentiate between color created by light and color created by paint. While the visual effects are ultimately random (given the variables of color, shape and perhaps most importantly, time), the framework for this experience is carefully calculated based on the arrangement of the planks. This is more easily visualized in a paint-only piece such as *Synopsis* /where it is apparent that color bands form tonal groups that thinly reference their original source material (Payne is coy in sharing the title of the film, perhaps not wanting to influence our view of her works).



Don't let me stand in your way (detail) . Mapped projection, acrylic on wood. 144” x 112”. 2013. Photo courtesy of the artist.

While the works may break free of visual references they are certainly grounded in twentieth-century artistic traditions. In viewing her paintings, I can't help but notice a nod to both Minimalism and even our own Washington Color School (“ Her sensitive use of color honors the legacy of her fellow MICA alumnus Morris Louis,” notes Smith.) , while the interjection of video components seeks to investigate some of the same temporal-based themes pioneered by modern video artists like Douglas Gordon. In asking about her influences Payne concedes there is a link:

*I wasn't conscious of it until I started doing [preparatory] study... It is inevitable in a way. I'm forced to acknowledge that this informs the work, but I'd like it to be more than 'I'm just modernizing a Colorfield painting'. There's a fine line between referencing history and repeating it.*

Payne cites that a key difference for her is the fact that her work is not exclusively abstract but is driven by the process of slip-scanning; there is a “method to the madness” she tells me. When asked to name her own influences, Colorfield painters take a backseat to the likes of Dan Flavin and James Turrell, Minimalists yes, but more importantly artists whose work she notes, “communicates a sublime experience with whatever light and structure is occurring in the room.” It’s a dynamic marriage of ideas, deceptively simple yet visually complex. Her works may not be the flashiest in the show (several performance artists will be competing for your attention), but if you let them, they just in fact might be the most mesmerizing.

*Academy 2013 runs from July 13 – August 24, 2013 at CONNERSMITH, with an opening party on Saturday July 13. The artist will be present. For more information, visit CONNERSMITH’s website [here](#) or Ms. Payne’s website [here](#).*