



**NELLIE
KING
SOLOMON**

OCHI PROJECTS / LOS ANGELES

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NELLIE KING SOLOMON



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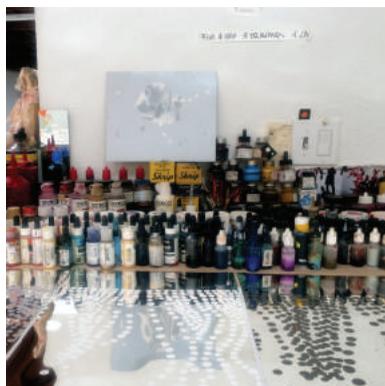
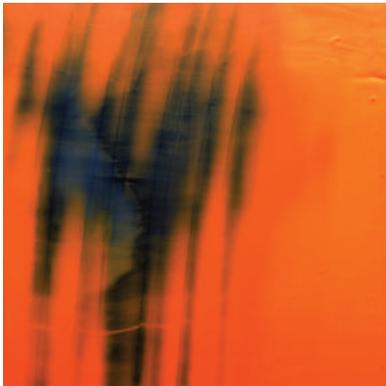
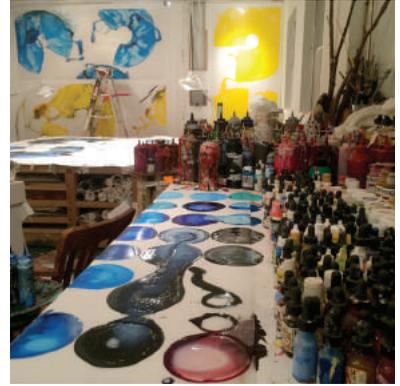
INTRODUCTION

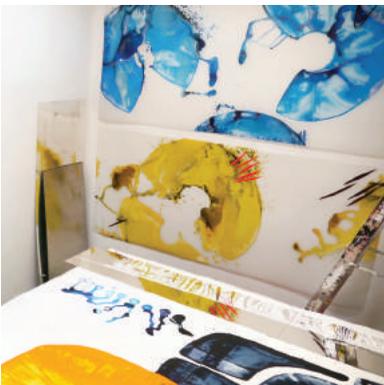
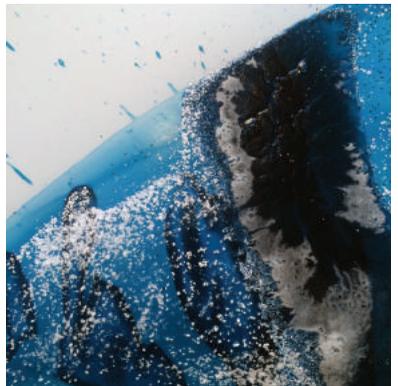
I've known Nellie since I was in high school and like to imagine that we are closer than the average artist/dealer. Back in 2012 Nellie encouraged me to take the necessary steps that led to the eventual opening of Ochi Projects in Los Angeles. When I finally signed a lease in early 2015, and had to schedule my first exhibitions, I called Nellie. I knew she was ready, had been ready, for her first solo show in Los Angeles, and that she had been patiently waiting for me to catch up.

Despite being, by all accounts, an exceptionally petite human, Nellie and her paintings have always been a force to be reckoned with. Her latest body of work is no exception. After spending three years making painstakingly content-rich, narrative work, and a subsequent health scare, Nellie returned to her innate, gestural, abstract paintings. The results are compelling in color and scale, and in my opinion, better than anything that has come before.

Hot Coals, the painting I've come to refer to as "the orangest thing you'll ever see in your entire life," epitomizes Nellie as a painter. When told never to mix anything with fluorescents Nellie immediately mixed everything she could think of with fluorescent orange—of all colors. *Hot Coals* is the ultimate outcome of her experiments. I admit that when I first unrolled it I could hardly look directly at it (the fluorescent orange is so vivid and deep that it actually impacts vision). The more I sat with it at the gallery, allowing my eyes to adjust to its audacity, the more I realized how beautifully honest it is. Back when I first met her I didn't consider how being a female abstract painter might come with certain challenges, but having watched Nellie and other female artists, I realize just how significant it is that such a small in stature female would make such a large, brave, painting. Fiercely loyal, unapologetic about her painting and exceptionally talented, I was honored to present Nellie as my first solo exhibition at Ochi Projects and am excited to see her career unfold over many years to come.

Pauli Ochi
owner, OCHI PROJECTS







STUDIO VISIT

Busting out of current painting expectations with restless physicality, Nellie King Solomon's work is big, brash, post-punk, and expressionistic (so expressionistic that she even uses the act of “pouring” in some of her work—a kind of AbEx boys meets Super Graphics mash-up series). Solomon is thoroughly sophisticated and historically conscious; like Yayoi Kusama she uses dots, as she says, to create “thoughts,” in a forceful yet poetic manner that establishes a rhythm that infiltrates one’s perceptual field.

Solomon upends the formal limits of oil and canvas by using mylar and SkyFuel (an industrial, reflective, solar panel material adhered to aluminum) as surface, her own custom glass tool as replacements for paint brushes, and soda ash, crystalina, gesso, acrylic and flock as materials. Her “Test Strips” are evidence of what she calls her “laboratory of materials.” Work is scaled up to heights as large as 7 by 7 feet (Solomon herself is a diminutive 5 feet and uses ladders to enhance her desired reach).

The reception to abstraction today is largely defined by a post-gendered landscape and a desire to study meanings beyond the purely visual, but many stereotypes still linger like twentieth-century ghosts. Female abstractionists have always struggled to achieve anything close to the visibility of their male peers. For example, mid-twentieth century moderns such as Joan Mitchell and Agnes Martin were compared to Robert Ryman and Sol LeWitt, and had to distinguish their work as not female or imbued with feminine politics or traits. In this struggle, they tried to rebel against the decorative as well as the biographical—both visual sensitivities attributed to female artists working in abstraction or non-figurative representation—in favor of the universal and the formality of the abstract image.

Insisting that her paintings “resist the sanctity of abstraction” of the high church of Minimalism, Solomon seeks to alchemize, in her own words, “adversity into generosity” and “disaster into humor.” She uses narratives and stories to substantiate her paintings—she feels a pressing need to extend them out from pure abstraction. But in truth, her energetic and conceptual work really needs no naming or branding. It stands boldly—and abstractly—on its own.

Natasha Boas
Studio Visit, Summer 2015



ESSAY

Nellie King Solomon holds her cards close to her chest. Or rather her paintings do. They don't readily reveal the manner of their creation. They're paintings by dint of the fact that they're paint on a support, but they share few qualities with what we traditionally consider painting. There is no canvas and no brush. Solomon paints on mylar, the semi-opaque material she began working with in architecture school. This substrate allows light to pass through, not just bounce off, her works, giving them a sense of inner illumination. It recedes into the background, letting the paint float on the surface.

On this ground sit large, sweeping arcs that teeter on the edge of control and abandon. Rivulets of running paint spill out from the forms' distinct outlines. An angry, organic energy threatens these self-contained shapes with dissolution. Pulled and pooled across the smooth mylar, they resemble the trails of some giant, unknown mollusk, or perhaps cross-sections of a microscopic creature on a glass slide. She sprinkles and blows unorthodox materials like soda ash or crystalina onto the edges of still half wet paint puddles, recalling aerial photographs of sediment-rich lakes. How they are formed is anyone's guess.

Instead of a brush, knife or some other traditional implement, Solomon works with custom made glass tools to spread the paint across the mylar. This lends a degree of anonymity to her mark making, in an attempt to remove herself — her hand — from her works. Still, each painting is the result of an intensely physical process, as she dances and clambers over them, laid flat on a large, slightly tilted table. Aside from the glass objects, she uses no other tools to create these broken rings. They reflect the natural sweep of her arm, and are remnants of her body's confrontation with the material. In this sense, they share something in common with Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* — where he used naked woman as paintbrushes — though here, Solomon is in complete control.

With their industrial, toxic palette and dustings of sparkly minerals, Solomon's works walk the line between attraction and repulsion, or as she says, between "reverence and kitsch." We are drawn to their keyed-up, candy-colored hues, even as they burn our eyes. These are punk paintings — direct, in our face, muscular, and messy, cheekily thumbing their nose at good taste and order. They share a kinship with the works of a very different artist, Marilyn Minter, whose hyper-realistic paintings revel in a similar combination of glamour and trash, sensuality and revulsion.

Although content is not readily apparent in her abstractions, Solomon's titles often evoke a narrative. One painting is named after Genghis Khan's first wife, Börte, who was abducted shortly after they were married. Khan was not able to rescue her for eight months, at which point it was discovered that she was pregnant, raising questions about paternity. Instead of disowning or killing the child, he claimed him as his own, also decreeing that all children born of questionable parentage were legitimate. He similarly embraced Börte, who became the most influential and beloved of Khan's wives. The feared and ruthless ruler is revealed as surprisingly compassionate and forward-thinking, a proto-feminist even. This provides a fitting metaphor for Solomon's practice, which injects unexpected narratives into the long-accepted, traditional story of painting.























IMAGES OF WORKS INDEX

Title Page Image

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute as seen through a *Failed Lens*

1.

Börte Seeks Genghis Khan, 2015
acrylic on mylar
84 x 84 inches

2.

Hot Coals, 2015
acrylic and soda ash on mylar
84 x 84 inches

3.

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute, 2015
acrylic on mylar
84 x 84 inches

4.

Untitled, 2015
acrylic, soda ash, crystalina on mylar
84 x 84 inches

5.

Shrapnel, 2015
acrylic, crystalina, soda ash on mylar
42 x 96 inches

6.

Cookie Monster, 2015
acrylic, rag paper, crystalina and soda ash on mylar
42 x 96 inches

7.

Untitled, 2015
acrylic, crystalina, soda ash on mylar
42 x 42 inches

Untitled, 2015

acrylic, crystalina, soda ash on mylar
42 x 42 inches

8.

Test Strips, 2015
acrylic, crystalina, flock and graphite on
mylar, skyfuel
12 x 42 inches (each)

INTERVIEW

Pauli Ochi: You spent several years prior to our *SkyFuel* show (Fall 2015) making content-rich work. How has it been going back to abstraction?

Nellie King Solomon: It feels great! It feels like I'm returning to home base, but with so much more ammunition. I feel excited for the clarity of it and to go back to my relationship with materials. I think about abstraction as a way of boiling everything down. At this point it's a way of getting to the center (the essence) of something that I'm not really allowed to say any other way. Often my paintings are about things I can't even talk about. It would be rude and impossible to say the stuff out loud. I enjoy that things are in code in an abstraction. It gives me the chance to translate the power of what I'm saying in a painting without divulging the meaning, or originating content, unless somebody wants to hear about it.

Pauli Ochi: Your side step into making more representational paintings seems to have brought a focus to the new abstractions; what you used to say in a group of paintings you now say in one painting—why do you think that is?

Nellie King Solomon: That's really insightful of you. I kind of hadn't realized that until you said it, but you're absolutely right. In the previous representational *New Narrative* series, which went on for several years, each painting took on an entire, enormous subject. I would harvest tons of images to come together in one painting. In doing the *New Narrative* series I realized that when I'm conceiving of and making a painting I'm often talking about something that is too honest to talk about. So I paint it. And in the abstract paintings I get to put those sometimes-sticky subjects in code. I can be even *more* honest. Now in this current series of abstractions, both the *SkyFuel* show and the newest canvases I'm working on, I find myself harvesting one topic per painting with pointed urgency the way I did in the *New Narrative* series.

For example, one of my favorite works from the *SkyFuel* series is a big, blue, 7' x 7' painting titled *Bortë Seeks Gangis Khan*. It has a tremendous amount of historical and political subtext. The story goes that Bortë, Genghis Khan's first wife, was abducted shortly after they were married. She was with child when Khan got her back and he accepted the child as his own, despite the fact that it probably wasn't his. Being a single mom I can only be with someone who is up to accepting a child



Solomon with two works from the *New Narrative* series

that's not his own (i.e. a Genghis Khan). That's a lot of narrative for an abstract painting, and many people really don't need or want to know these stories at all, but that's what I was thinking about when I made it.

Pauli Ochi: Like a song. Some people interpret lyrics while others extract meaning from the music as a whole.

Nellie King Solomon: Exactly. The urgency of these paintings comes from knowing where they're coming from and why, which is why I title them the way I do. But for some people the stories seem unnecessary and they just want to be left with the impact, which is fine. In the end it's the power of the experience I want to convey, not the content.

Pauli Ochi: What was it about the work you made for *SkyFuel* that encouraged you to experiment with canvas, which is something you've never worked with before.

Nellie King Solomon: I've been curious about moving to canvas for a long time and my new studio and new studio assistant make it all feel fresh and possible. But the exact moment I decided to do the yellow 7' x 7' on canvas was during the artist talk I did at Ochi Projects in front of a group of UCLA Extension students. Nick Brown, who is an artist and was teaching the class, would reiterate and translate what I said to his class in an interesting and unexpected way. He told them what gesso was, and why the way I was using it was unusual (it isn't just a backdrop material for me). Nick knows his art history and the history of materials and explained to his class some of the flips and irreverent tricks I was playing on the tradition of painting. Hearing it out loud made me more aware of it, and I saw how hilarious it would be to play that all out on canvas. I knew I was going to try it before the conversation was over.

I also had people in the studio the week before I shipped the *SkyFuel* show. One visit with curator, Natasha Boas, really put wind in my sails. Natasha was so excited about the works saying they are, “paintings that interrogate painting.” She called them tough, physical and relentless—punk paintings, with radical, raw emotion. It seemed fitting to conduct that interrogation of painting right into and onto the possibilities and limitations of the traditional substrate of canvas.

But the decision to go to canvas is also a very physical, material one. I wanted to see the hot, toxic paint quality of this *SkyFuel* series in my new clean studio on the raw, earthy canvas. The toxic quality of these paintings will keep it industrial, which is what the mylar did for me when I was using softer colors.

Pauli Ochi: You've never been one to shy away from experimenting with new materials, what elements do you require to be consistent, no matter the material?

Nellie King Solomon: What I require is "listening" to the materials themselves for what they want to do and be. My dad was a Stanford English major and he hates when I say "listen" about something that isn't verbal or auditory, but I use that word very intentionally for the absorptive state of receiving that is needed when considering a material. I used to teach a course called "Material Matters" (also at Stanford) and the idea of that course is that any material you choose comes with all kinds of cultural associations and physical properties. And that those qualities are 90% of whatever you'll make with them. So that's why I say you have to "listen" because the materials themselves are inherently going to provide so much of the content and solutions in the work.

Pauli Ochi: So clearly material is important to you, which has been obvious throughout your career. What else are you interested in as a painter?



Studio shot, *In Hot Pursuit*, 2015-16
84 x 84 inches
mixed media on canvas



Studio shot, *Cold Stacks*, 2016
84 x 126 inches
acrylic, ink, soda ash and color pencil on canvas

Nellie King Solomon: Honesty. Humor. That power when a painting hits you right in the middle of your chest and you almost lose your wind.

Pauli Ochi: I love when that happens. It's rare, but I know the feeling. Along those lines, we've spoken at length about the role, importance, relevance and irrelevance of abstract painting. What keeps it fresh for you? Both as a maker and when looking at other artists' works?

Nellie King Solomon: Of course we always weigh the irrelevance (haha), but I saw Barry McGee's show the other day just before I had to go pick up my sister in the ER, and it made the show stick with me. Instead of art seeming irrelevant in the face of real life and medical needs, it actually seemed more sharply necessary than ever. Maybe I'm just ridiculously committed to painting, but sometimes I feel like paint is what keeps everything else fresh. I am compelled to paint. The results are only part of it; there is an inner drive that uses paint to synthesize, understand, and process the rest of the world.

Looking at paintings is really different from the drive to make them. But it feeds and informs the form it will take. When I see a killer show like Barry's, or work by Mary Weatherford, Rosson Crow, Tomory Dodge, or even back when I was in high school and first saw Turner, Ryder or Kiefer, the impact, clarity, scale and commitment to their ways of seeing the world gave me, and continues to give me food, faith, and clarity of my own. It fuels me and continues to locate me in how I want to see the world and what I want to make.

