

WORDS & PICTURES:

Kristin Farr's Path as an Artist and Journalist

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When the words in an art magazine are right and sincere, turning a page can be like stepping into a studio. When a conversation in a magazine not only leads you into the artist's practice, but also allows you to access specific moments—whether it be a turning point for an artist or a moment of inspiration or transformation—it allows you to enter their world. Not just the world of a particular artist, but the art world at large. During a time when I felt distanced from what was happening in the art world, art magazines were my way to hold a part of that world in my hands. For me, Juxtapoz, and the writing of Kristin Farr in particular, had a tremendous impact on my outlook and what it means to be an artist. Her interviews have introduced me to artists I love, like Masako Miki, and immersed me even more into the work of artists I loved already, like Mary Iverson.

California-based Kristin Farr is not only the deputy editor for Juxtapoz, but she is also an incredible artist in her own right. The kaleidoscope-like patterns and endless color combinations in her paintings are influenced by her synesthesia, a condition where certain sensations are associated with experiencing specific colors. Influenced by patterns found in folk art, Farr's work precisely dissects blocks of solid color and reconstructs them in a geometric, often symmetrical, circular pattern. The result is nothing short of a mesmerizing, transforming anything it touches to a playful wonderland of color fractals, splayed out like shattered glass across a brick wall, a playground, or a canvas.

Earning a dual degree in sculpture and textiles, Farr's work has been exhibited in galleries across the country as well as in numerous locations as public art. Other than in Juxtapoz, you can also find her writing in the New York Times. As painter, writer, editor, curator, and teacher, this tour-de-force draws on her many talents in order to thrive in countless sectors of the arts.





I HAVE BEEN A LONG-TIME FAN OF YOUR ARTWORK. HOWEVER, I FIRST BECAME AWARE OF WHAT YOU DO THROUGH YOUR WORK WITH JUXTAPOZ, WHERE YOU WORK AS DEPUTY EDITOR. CAN YOU TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR PATH IN ARTS JOURNALISM?

I worked at the local PBS/NPR station right out of college, writing art reviews and working on documentary TV and web videos about artists. I have lucked out on all of my wonderful jobs. A local artist requested me as his interviewer when he was selected for a Juxtapoz feature in 2009 and I did my very best work so they'd keep me. I was a fan of the magazine since I was a teenager, so it was a dream to write for them. It's a privilege to make a significant art magazine with a small group of friends.

YOU'VE CONDUCTED COUNTLESS INTERVIEWS WITH MANY TALENTED ARTISTS. ARE THERE ANY IN PARTICULAR THAT STAND OUT? CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT AN INTERVIEW THAT DIDN'T GO THE WAY YOU EXPECTED, WHETHER IT WAS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Yes, so many. I'm lucky that I can talk to nearly any artist and ask them anything I want. It's been an incredible arts education chatting one-on-one with hundreds of successful artists. David Shrigley was my favorite. He is a genius and hilarious, both as an artist and person. I interviewed comic artist and Ghost World creator Daniel Clowes for the cover of that same issue, so it's still my most memorable.

I was a big Miranda July fan and persisted for 18 months to finally get an interview with her, but we did not become best friends as I had hoped. That was in 2012. Recent favorites are Ellen Berkenblit, Naudline Pierre, Swoon, and Diedrick Brackens, and so many more.



I ALWAYS ENJOY READING YOUR WORK—
YOUR INTERVIEWS IN JUXTAPOZ ALLOW
THE READER TO FULLY ENGAGE WITH THE
ARTIST’S PRACTICE. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR
EXPERIENCE AS AN ARTIST AFFECTS YOUR
APPROACH INTERVIEWING AND WRITING ABOUT
ARTISTS?

Yes. I probably ask questions that non-artists might not, but I’m also more likely to ask about their favorite color, rather than theoretical questions.

Thanks for reading my interviews! I work hard at trying to make them good.

HAVING MANY DIFFERENT PASSIONS IN THE
ARTS MYSELF, I FIND IT CAN BE DIFFICULT
JUGGLING DIFFERENT CREATIVE PROJECTS AT
A TIME. I’M CURIOUS WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR
EXPERIENCE DIVIDING YOUR TIME BETWEEN
CREATING ARTWORK, INTERVIEWING ARTISTS,
AND CURATING PROJECTS. DO YOU FIND THAT
YOUR ARTISTIC PRACTICES FEED INTO ONE
ANOTHER?

I eat, sleep and breathe all my jobs. I don’t clock out and stop thinking about art, or ever get a break from the juggling. Art is something you do because you can’t help it, and it’s typically a constant preoccupation. When I get home from managing other artists’ projects, I write and edit Juxtapoz interviews, and when I take a break from my day jobs, I manage my personal mural biz and studio work. Even the time I spend trying to fall asleep is dedicated to problem-solving whatever art project is on deck. I don’t have that work/life balance. I am working or thinking about arts 100% of the time.



YOUR PAINTINGS ARE INTRICATE AND HYPNOTIC, ALMOST PAINSTAKINGLY PRECISE. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PROCESS CREATING SUCH ELABORATE PATTERNS OF COLOR, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU OFTEN CREATE THESE PAINTINGS IN OUTSIDE SETTINGS IN THE FORM OF MURALS AND INSTALLATIONS?

I started these geometric “hexagon” paintings as an influence from my Pennsylvania Dutch folk art heritage. Hex Signs are traditionally painted on barns and have different meanings and symbolism. Mine are an interpretation, and I try to develop my own spins on patterning, though most geometric patterns have been around since ancient history.

Drawing is my least favorite part of the process because I am all about the color and the painting, not the counting and dividing lines with a ruler and pencil. I do not use tape or stenciling. There is definitely some human error in there. They might look precise, but the measurements are sometimes up to half an inch off center, and the lines can be a little crooked. I always say, “if you want something perfect, you should make it on a computer.” I also like the artist ESPO’s line, “Perfection is standard, mistakes cost extra.” I like the handmade quality of line work with a brush, freehand! Freehand is just a good word and a good practice of trusting yourself.



My hand gets steadier and the detail gets smaller and tighter as I try to one-up myself with every project, whether it's a studio painting or a multi-story mural. As Cardi B says, "I'm my own competition, I'm competin' with myself."

I’M VERY INTERESTED TO HEAR HOW YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH SYNESTHESIA AFFECTS YOUR PRACTICE. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH COLOR MUST BE MUCH DIFFERENT THAN THE AVERAGE PERSON. DOES THIS INFLUENCE YOUR APPROACH TO COLOR AND PIGMENT AS A WHOLE?

I have grapheme-color synesthesia, all words and numbers have a color in my mind, which makes me very attuned to color. I get street names mixed up if they are both the same color in my mind. Because my synesthesia is related to words, it affects both my writing and my art. My writing feels good if it seems “colorful” in my mind. It affects the art more in my intuition for picking colors.

YOUR PAINTINGS IMMEDIATELY BRING TO MIND ONE OF MY FAVORITE ARTISTS: BRIDGET RILEY. I’M CURIOUS IF YOU ARE INFLUENCED BY HER WORK AT ALL OR BY THE OP ART MOVEMENT MORE GENERALLY?

People keep asking me about Bridget Riley, and I’m not influenced by her, but I see that we speak a similar language. We both use color blocks and some 3D illusions, but mine is more about folk art than Op Art, although I appreciate her work, of course. I also like the school of Hard-Edge painting. I get many comments about a variety of artists or designers who use rainbow colors and geometric shapes in their work. We all use these visual tools to say different things.



**IF I LOOK AT YOUR PAINTINGS FOR A WHILE,
THEY ALMOST APPEAR TO BE MOVING, TURNING,
OR VIBRATING WITH A PULSE. HAVE YOU EVER
WORKED IN VIDEO?**

It's magical when something still or static really appears to be moving or vibrating, so I'm glad to hear that the paintings work as intended for you.

I have been making short documentary videos about artists forever, including an Emmy-winning video series called Art School that you can find on YouTube. I also made funny stop motion videos for a couple years, and I make time-lapses of me painting. And everyone likes to see the circle paintings spin as a GIF. I recently installed three large public sculptures in Irvine, CA where the circles designs spin via hand-crank. A dream come true!



**WHEN IN NEED OF INSPIRATION OR
MOTIVATION, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU
LIKE TO DO?**

Spend time with my dogs and family, and, lately, build tiny miniature model interiors.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY PROJECTS IN THE WORKS
THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?**

Two big murals coming up in 2020 in the Bay Area!

