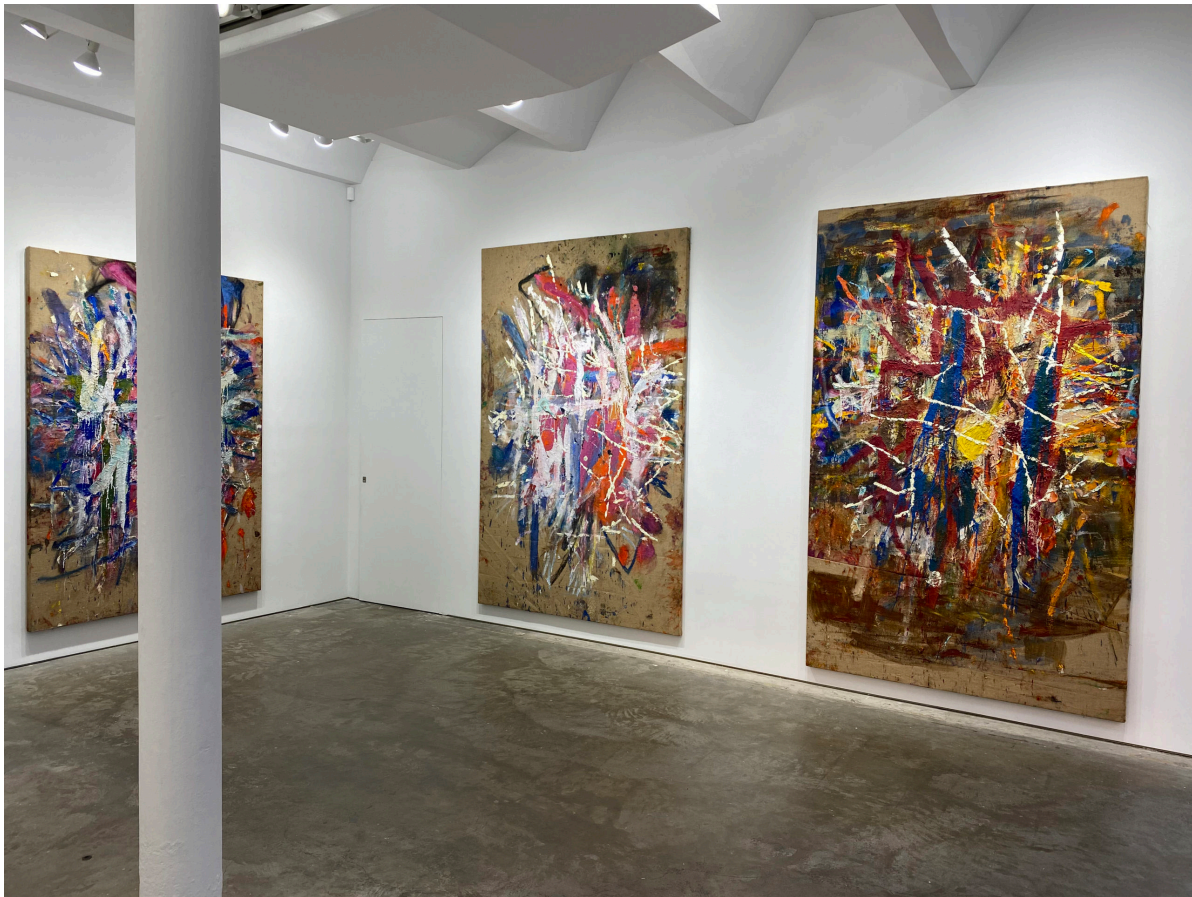




Spencer Lewis Opens Harper's Chelsea with Explosion of Color Multi-media painter splashes large canvas in small new space

By Ben Kurson
January 29, 2021



Three of the six works by Spencer Lewis in the inaugural show at Harper's Chelsea. (Photo: Ken Kurson for Fine Art Globe)

It's impossible for art critics - at least for badly educated, unimaginative art critics - to view large format drip-based chaos paintings and not compare them to Jackson Pollock. But that type of facile Morley Safer-style "any monkey could make a painting like this" reaction instantly evaporates when confronted by the power of an inspired abstract artist.

Spencer Lewis, a young 40-something artist currently on display at Harper's Gallery, is just such an artist.

There are only six paintings hanging in the small one room gallery. But they are so striking, colorful and alive that they seem to fill a much bigger space. That's a dynamic much on the mind of the gallery itself.



A close-up of the standout work by Spencer Lewis, acrylic, oil, enamel, spray paint, and ink on jute, 96h x 67w. (Photo: Ken Kurson for Fine Art Globe)

This is the inaugural show at Harper's Chelsea. It was launched by rare book dealer Harper Levine and joins his existing spots on the South Fork and on the Upper East Side. The gallery side of the business emerged from Levine's circle of friends in the Hamptons.

Sandwiched between two heavy-hitter galleries – Lehmann Maupin and Hauser & Wirth – Harper's intends to feature mostly emerging artists. Mr. Lewis' large, mixed media paintings are on jute, a long, soft, shiny bast fiber that can be made into burlap or gunny cloth.

According to the show's info sheet, ten years ago Lewis "began working on cardboard as a means

to displace the preciousness of painting and to liberate his emotive impulses, which included physically assaulting his paintings with rocks. Painting on cardboard, and eventually jute, became a form of catharsis, because, as Lewis put it, 'nothing mattered and so anything was possible.'"

To me, the standout work (they're all untitled) is the yellow-dominated 96h x 67w acrylic, oil, enamel, spray paint, and ink on jute. A close look reveals such heavy material saturation that a paintbrush is actually suspended in the work. That's a feature of at least a couple of the works, but it doesn't feel like a gimmick so much as a theme.

Meanwhile, Levine's reputation for fine taste and an eccentric approach – he once staged a one-day sale of his late mother's peerless collection of 300 pairs of Ferragamo shoes – looks to be off to a fine start at the family's new home in Chelsea.

WHO: Spencer Lewis

WHAT: *Six Jutes*

WHERE: Harper's Chelsea, 534 West 22nd street, New York, NY 10011

WHEN: January 13 - February 13, 2021, Tues-Sat, 10 am-6 pm