

DAILY BRUIN

'Made in LA' Mondays: Caitlin Lonagan

Written by KellyAnne Tang
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©Caitlin Lonagan. Courtesy of Hammer Museum.

Standing before the collision of copper and midnight blue oil paint, visitors might not imagine that the artist behind this medley of color was once an aspiring engineer.

Caitlin Lonagan, UCLA alumna and Los Angeles-based artist, went from calculating angular velocity as an undergraduate student at Yale to showcasing her abstract oil paintings in the "Made in L.A. 2014" biennial exhibition at the UCLA Hammer Museum.

She started her college career as a physics student but four years later she graduated with bachelor's degrees in both applied physics and art. She soon traded New Haven, Conn., for Los Angeles and in 2010, she graduated with a master of fine arts degree from UCLA. It was there that Lonagan started to develop her artistic identity.

"I learned to deconstruct the values that different authorities were teaching me and to make sure I was working with my own internal set of criteria," Lonagan said. "My work pertains to whatever I'm thinking about at the time, not some sort of issue or display of skill or anybody else's values."

Just as she holds her own identity sacred, Lonagan values the individuality of her pieces.

"I keep pieces around (the studio) until I feel they have their own identity, until they're no longer just a byproduct of my process," Lonagan said. "Every piece has a strong image that unfolds, and I allow each piece to arrive at different conclusions."

Just as in her undergraduate studies, Lonagan continues to pursue a multitude of interests and the inspiration for

her art shifts as she dabbles in different disciplines.

"Now I'm taking a writing course and I've started using writing structures to inspire me," Lonagan said.

Her interest in fiction inspired her work showcased in "Made in L.A. 2014." She said the idea of the narrative and the different writing elements involved in storytelling acted as a departure point for her decisions throughout the painting process. She experimented with a new palette of metallic paints, and she said this group of paintings also represents a change in her approach.

"My last body of work was made under the conceit that the canvas is a page or a letter," Lonagan said. "I was thinking of one type of address. The work in 'Made in L.A.' is a shift away from that point of view."

Lonagan considers her "Made in L.A." work a progression of her relationship with seriality in that she moved away from the idea of addressing a single viewer.

Lonagan said she has no specific message to impart on visitors to her exhibit but she hopes her work captures their attention.

"I trust that people take their own lives and experiences to artwork, and I think it's ungenerous not to let them," Lonagan said. "The biggest compliment would be if they just choose to spend time on my work."