

ART & CULTURE DT



Ariel Dill found inspiration for her watercolors while taking daily 4 p.m. walks with her toddler during the pandemic and observing the flora and fauna in her neighborhood.

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Time and place inspire Ladies' Room exhibition

By Bridgette M. Redman
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When the pandemic forced many to go into lockdown, one solace was time spent outdoors — taking walks, sitting on porches, enjoying picnics, jogging or engaging in any of numerous other activities that could be done alone or in one's own pod.

For artists who are trained to notice things, this opportunity led to new creations capturing the natural environs of Los Angeles.

Ladies' Room, a Downtown Los Angeles gallery that features the work of women and nonbinary artists, is displaying two related solo shows that feature artists who did just this. The show is entirely online at ladiesroomla.org.

Julika Lackner is exhibiting "Twilight" and Ariel Dill is exhibiting "Four O'Clocks" through July 24. With works painted almost exclusively during the pandemic, the two exhibitions capture the same spirit using very different styles and techniques.

Lackner's oil and acrylic paintings are born out of the city's twilight hours, landscapes that she viewed from her wrap-around porch and combining several of her previous styles. Dill's watercolors were inspired by walks with a rambunctious child taken at 4 p.m. daily.

Twilight brings out lines of light

Born in Berlin in 1980, Lackner lives and works in Los Angeles after earning her MFA from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena in 2006 and a B.A. from the University of California Santa Barbara in 2001.

"I started painting representationally when I was an undergrad in 2001," Lackner said.

She was painting the interiors of subway stations in Berlin because she was fascinated with how the artificial light changed in those spaces. When she arrived in Pasadena, her work changed, though she was still fascinated with light.

"I changed into painting Los Angeles at night, but it was still pretty representational," Lackner said. "It was all about paint and the orbs of light in the fog and that big dome of LA sky that is always lit."

She then began to paint in a more abstract manner, delving into atmosphere and space. She started a series of linear landscapes that were mostly of places in California, but also other big spaces like Yellowstone, Death Valley and Yosemite — what she called all the heavy hitters of dramatic landscapes.

Then 2020 came and the lockdowns grounded her.

"For the very first time, I thought I should paint my view," Lackner said. "I live in Eagle Rock, and we have a wraparound deck and I'd never thought seriously to paint it."

She watched the sunset every night, taking photos she could refer to while painting. She merged her style from grad school with her linear landscapes by bringing in colored lines that represented the light that is in the city reflected into the sky.

Lackner said it is tricky to paint the LA skyscape because so many people have attempted it and others know it well. She navigated the conflict between what her eye saw with the images she carried in her head.

"I really love this northeast area of LA and the hills and the lights," Lackner said. "A lot of people would say, 'That looks like my view.' It's funny because it is a ubiquitous LA view that a lot of people have or know. It is immediately recognizable to those who know it."

At first, she resisted including landmarks that would pin down a view, but eventually the LA skyline made it into the paintings.

There are 20 pieces in the exhibit, but she created 60 paintings in this series, ranging in size from 5 by 7 inches to 48 by 60. Each is numbered.

She called "Twilight 29" a good example of the series. She painted it in 2021 and said it is special to her.

"It has the elements that speak for all of them — the gradient of the night sky and it goes into an orangey sunset," Lackner said. "It also has some clouds that exemplify the atmosphere and then the stripes. The clouds kind of go into the



Julika Lackner painted scenes of Los Angeles skylines at twilight throughout the pandemic. The vertical lines reflect the lights of the city.

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stripes. It seems translucent. The view is personal to me as it is exactly my bedroom view."

She began the series in April 2020. When the pandemic started, she was working on her linear landscapes and commissions. Then she saw a photo she took on her phone of the night sky from her deck and was inspired.

"I was trying to capture the twinkling lights in the hills," Lackner said.

"It had this very warm feeling. I wanted the twinkling lights, but I didn't want the dark, dark night sky. That time right after the sun went down has this really nice way of bringing the city lights up into the sky. It's just a gorgeous time of day."

She said she had never painted sunsets. In her 20 years of painting landscapes, she avoided sunsets and sunrises and the subsequent pinks and oranges. The change received a warm reception.

"People really responded positively to it," Lackner said.

"That makes a difference. I had an immediate positive response and that was very encouraging."

Flora and fauna jumped out

Ariel Dill has returned to Los Angeles after moving to the East Coast to earn an MFA from Hunter College in New York.

Her series is made up of watercolor, gouache and pencil on paper. It uses visual languages of surrealism, children's book illustrations, Japanese prints and the Los Angeles surroundings.

As she painted during the pandemic, she noticed her pieces were influenced by her neighborhood and the nature surrounding Los Angeles.

"Basic things you see all the time here just walking — these have shown up in the work," Dill said.

At first, she didn't realize she was creating a series — they were just her watercolors, works she was planning to use in a book. After she made the book with a friend, she continued art that took shape around a specific time and place — much of it influenced by being in lockdown with a 3 1/2 year old.

"She did her preschool Zoom and stuff like that and what we always ended up doing was this walk at 4 p.m.," Dill said. "I felt like we had to change it up and go outside and do something. It is that time of day before it really starts turning into evening."

As her daughter stuck to her schedule, it forced her to be aware of the time and what she was seeing — the flowers that were intensely blooming, the gardens and the trees.

"It just made sense — what I was feeling and what the work was doing," Dill said. "It's a series about time and I'd make the paintings and it was an ongoing thing. I'd make them at certain times of day."

She focused on certain flowers and fauna all within the framework of creating a schedule with her child.

"There wasn't anything else to do, so we had to do that," Dill said. "That was actually the high point of the whole lockdown — these fun walks that happened in the pandemic. Sometimes she'd be on her scooter or her trike."

With more than 50 paintings in the series, she presented them to Annie Wharton, the gallery director and curator who chose pieces for the exhibition.

Dill had another show, "Waves," with Wharton in January 2020. Wharton returned to her for the online show.

"She said, 'I want to show this.' People in other countries could access it," Dill said. "It is the right format for this work. It's almost like seeing them as book pages or something."

Dill's pandemic walks provided her initial, visual research the way her other works took clues from old postcards, children's books, nature catalogs or the way lights hit the wall.

"When I'm actually painting, I use that information, it becomes a jumping off point," Dill explained. "I'm painting and then the painting takes over and I'm not so much thinking. I'm letting the painting dictate what is happening."

"Twilight" by Julia Lackner and "Four O'Clocks" by Ariel Dill

WHEN: Through July 24

WHERE: ladiesroomla.org