

Celia Gerard

A PIECE APART WOMAN

There's a quiet complexity to the art of New York painter and sculptor Celia Gerard, whose interdisciplinary work explores shape, line, and the blurring of color through abstractly geometric responses to surroundings; it's a repackaging and reimagining of a landscape in puzzle piece format. Nine months out of the year, Gerard works from New York City, where she balances her own artwork and upcoming shows with teaching at Pratt, School of Visual Arts and Columbia University. For the remaining months, she retreats to quiet Wainscott, NY, in the farmhouse she shares with her partner Mark, where — in between walks around the neighborhood and to the nearby farm stand — she cranks out work from a backyard studio. Just as the seasons started to change (and on perhaps the only rainy day of the season), we visited Celia at home to discuss her art-driven upbringing, her upcoming projects, and the concepts that inform her ongoing work.



Can you share a little about your childhood? What was your upbringing like?

I grew up with two younger brothers in New York City. My mother is a photographer (she kept a darkroom in our apartment) and my father has worn a variety of hats in government, finance, and the arts. There are many artists in my mother's family and my paternal grandmother founded the Pittsburgh Ballet so I was always surrounded by art and music. I loved drawing, playing piano, writing, reading — anything that engaged me imaginatively. During school vacations we spent considerable time in the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, since my parents felt this was a necessary antidote to city life. It was a childhood filled with extremes. Becoming an artist was probably the most natural thing I could have done. I didn't realize until later that it wasn't "normal."

You explain your work on your website as an investigation into "how traces of memory form new images and representations of the present." Can you share more about this idea?

The painter Joan Mitchell said: "I paint from remembered landscapes that I carry with me and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would more like to paint what it leaves with me." The tactile qualities and exploration of form in my works on paper have been directed towards an investigation of depth, a kind of interior space. I recently started a series of sculpture that has lead me to the question: what is possible in three dimensions? How do we exist in the in-between – the internal and the external – simultaneously? These questions feel prescient to contemporary life, and sculpture feels particularly necessary now as a disruption to the virtual world that permeates the space of our existence – both physical and psychological.

In the same vein, what current ideas, palettes, or creative concepts are inspiring you?

- Picasso sculpture currently on view at MoMA.
- Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein, "being-there"
- The newly remastered version of Errol Garner's live album "Concert By The Sea" recorded on September 19, 1955 in Carmel, California.
- Fall blues and browns at the beach.

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Do you go through times of feeling stagnant or uninspired? If so, what do you do to break the slump?

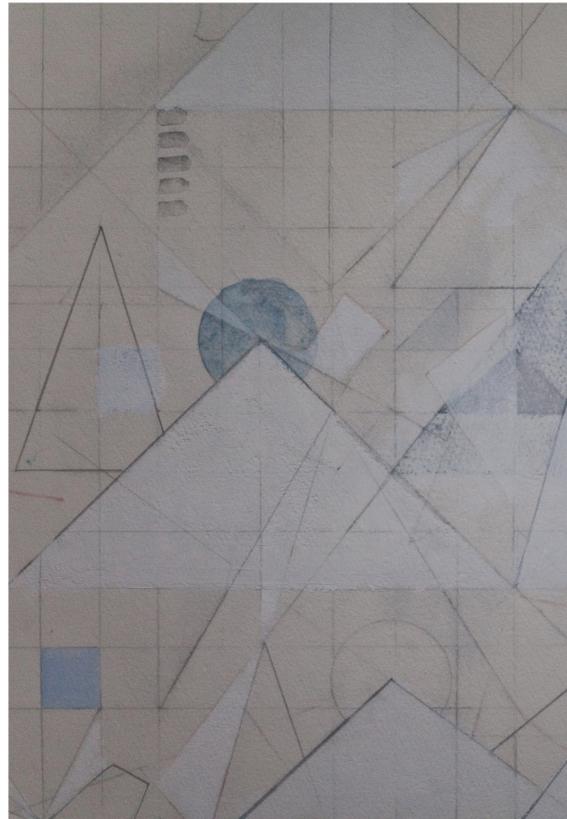
I work. I try to be alert and available. As the painter John Graham said, it takes “persistence and faith!”

How does a dual perspective — splitting time between NYC and Long Island — influence your creative process?

Summers are spent reading and working in my studio, time with Mark at the beach, and visiting with family and friends. The rest of the year I am balancing studio work with teaching so my attention is more divided. I think the creative process remains pretty consistent, but of course unstructured time is a big help.

You have a few exciting projects coming up: can you share more about the upcoming shows that you’re working on and what each will involve?

My next show at Tayloe Piggott Gallery opens this December in Jackson, Wyoming. The exhibition will include 6 or 7 new works on paper of various sizes. My third one-person show at Sears-Peyton Gallery in NYC opens next fall. I’m planning to exhibit both works on paper and new sculpture in plaster and bronze. I worked at Tallix Foundry just out of college and have done quite a bit of welding, but bronze casting is new to me. I’m really excited about it.



What are you serious about?

Too much.

What will you never take seriously?

Social media.

What objects have been most significant to you lately?

Art made by friends and family.

Your days are pretty varied: what constants remain?

Every morning Romeo (our cat) wakes me up and Mark brings me coffee in bed. After that, it's usually to the studio or school.



What do you make for a dinner with friends? Can you share a recipe?

I love to try new recipes when cooking for friends. Here's what's next on my list – many thanks to Mark's mom, Patty McGrath, for sharing one of her favorites with me.

Fish Stew for 6

Ingredients

- 1/4 c olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 large yellow onions, chopped
- 2 green peppers, seeded and chopped
- 4 (14 & 1/2 oz.) cans Italian tomatoes, diced
- 1 (6 oz) can tomato paste
- 2 (6 oz) cans tomato sauce
- 3 cups burgundy
- 1/2 bunch Italian parsley, chopped
- 3 (or more to taste) T. dried oregano
- 3 (or more to taste) T. dried basil
- 1 t. salt
- 2 (or more, lots) T. coarsely ground black pepper
- 1/2 c. water 4 tins minced clams with juice
- 1 & 1/2 lbs. halibut, grouper or scrod, cut into bite size pieces
- 1 lb. lump crabmeat
- 2 lbs. jumbo fresh shrimp, cleaned with tails on
- 2 dozen littleneck clams, steamed (I steam in white wine – could use broth/water)
- Fresh Italian parsley for garnish

Directions: In a large soup pot sauté veggies in oil about 10 minutes. Add all the ingredients through the water and simmer covered 1 & 1/2 hours. (May do this a day ahead. Refrigerate. Spices will sharpen in flavor). Add tinned clams and juice with fish. Simmer 1 & 1/2 hours longer. Adjust seasoning to taste. Add shrimp, and crab and cook for 3-4 minutes stirring constantly. Add steamed clams. Stir well, garnish with parsley and serve hot!

What's your mantra?

I have to quote one of my Pratt students from a couple of years ago. He said, "Line Quality is your mantra" and made these great t-shirts for our entire drawing class with "LINE QUALITY" silkscreened on the front in terrible handwriting.



What's the last great thing you read?
"L'Arrière-pays" by Yves Bonnefoy

A great artist gets inspiration from anywhere — what are some of the most unusual sources of inspiration for you?

Even though I have spent my entire life here, the shapes and light in NYC continue to amaze and inspire me. A couple of weeks ago, I was walking down the High Line with my friend, the painter Susan Walp, after a gallery opening. We were awed by the juxtapositions between the fading plantings and the graffiti and the tourists and the shiny new buildings and the crumbling old buildings and the glimpses of the Hudson and the setting sun – it was truly magical. I think this kind of experience is not unusual. Magic can be anywhere, we just need to pay attention.



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