



Installation view of Nancy Callan's exhibition at Heller Gallery featuring three blown-glass works (L TO R) *Chrome Yellow Droplet*, *Cherry Red Droplet*, and *Cerulean Blue Droplet* (all 2020), the tallest at 20 ½ inches. COURTESY: HELLER GALLERY, NEW YORK

Nancy Callan

"DIALOGUES"
HELLER GALLERY
NEW YORK CITY
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Originally a graphic designer, Nancy Callan was drawn to artists employing repetition and its variations—artists like Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin. She looks also to Op Art legends like Bridget Riley for inspiration for her surface treatments on glass. And if one plans to speak to the concerns and practice of painting through the material glass, one had better understand both the history of the medium and what constitutes success. Perhaps the perfect material, by nature of the beast—or at least certainly worthy of such cross-media exploration—the characteristics of transparency and captured physical space certainly set the stage for achievement with glass.

When painting among avant-garde practitioners largely left the pictorial (the canvas approached as a literal window, imagery mimicking the world) for an exploration of the field and surface in the 1950s, makers embraced color, line, form, and texture as vehicles of emotional rendering and a means to an end—be it the embrace simply of surface, or the push-pull of spatial relationships investigated in stroke, mass, and juxtaposition. (The

referential go-to for these types of expressive works, of course, is Jackson Pollock—even the layman now knows his spilled and dribbled application of paint.) In spirit, however, a better comparison for Callan might come via second-generation abstract painters like Joan Mitchell ... or, better yet, the gestural and volumetric explorations of Grace Hartigan as her work edged toward an implied realism, echoed in Callan's *Droplets*. Heller has on exhibit a brilliant set of three, in primary colors.

By adopting the flat surface in her new, wall-mounted works (presented in a group), Nancy Callan shuns object-ness for fragmentation. Acknowledged in the geometric of juxtaposition and multiplicity, the cluster of vitreous panels reveal, in denied chiaroscuro, a frank infatuation with the bold power of contrasting black and white. So, sure, there is eye candy here in Nancy's exhibition, but it is daring and unapologetic, embraced not as mere surface decoration alone, but as a conduit to a greater conceptual grounding and reference. Here we are tied to humanity—the sea as the point of mankind's genesis, the mapping of the heavens and earth, and the microcosm as an enticing source of mystery. Here, also, is science, void the fantasy of "higher purpose," and in embrace of the alchemical process of being and of

procedural evidence. Whether a reflective mapped spider web or a "Big Bang," Callan's work is no longer a space achieved in one- or two-point perspective, but an improvement even on Cubism's multi-perspective. Hers is a surface geometry absent true physical volume and yet multidimensional.

There are two older objects brilliantly included in this exhibition of otherwise new works made this year. Perhaps easily mistaken as inconsequential but important in revealing the trajectory of her growth, this pair is important to understanding the genius of her journey. We all walk before we run. The magical *Dark Matter Orb* (2012) finds a mapping conforming to shape and remains, subsequently, surface decoration, the lines of longitude and latitude only circumnavigating the globe-like object. Here, Callan is yet tethered to her craft. *White Net Cone* (2011) is an earlier, if unrecognized, glimpse at what will come—the clear form allowing the eye's "folding" of surface embellishment, the overlapping, spaghetti-thin line facilitating that leap from the third dimension to Einstein's implied fourth, and soon beyond.

Like an expertly tossed fishing net into an ether of undulating viscosity, the veneer of Callan's *M-Theory* reveals evidence, too, of a personal history—muscle memory the place of renewed wonder. And what a wonderful journey accidental topologist Nancy Callan finds herself navigating: age-old technical proficiencies revealing in her newest of works a discovery of scientific relevancy; an array of latticed possibility lying in wait, floating in space, recalling painting's grid system—now, however, in suggested quantum dimension, a matrix, the technical recontextualized in captured transitory moment. In the complex weave of this metaphorical basket, now relative string theory, we are reminded of manifold containment—the holding of people, places, and things; memories, even time itself captured (and questioned) in the mind's weave and weft. Here the whole is so much greater than the sum of its parts. This is what glass can and ought to be. Here, allegorically, are society's disruptions: strange and original juxtapositions, unsettling and a mirror to the human psyche in times of political upheaval and, presently, unseen plague. This is art, perhaps remedy. Catch up to Nancy.

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