

INTERVIEW: PAM GLICK

James Barron

I'm so excited to have these two paintings and to present them. Could you tell me how the zip in these paintings came about?

Pam Glick

When I got to Buffalo, I started drawing and painting Niagara Falls, and I realized the crucial part of the Falls is that line between horizontal and vertical. The river is the horizontal, and the Falls is the vertical, and where it changes is a 45 degree angle. I also started drawing houses when I first got here. I was drawn to the corners, where the two sides of a house met. I like angles, and I like spatial descriptions on two dimensions. When I went to Niagara Falls, I thought, "Oh, this is just like the corner of a house."

And then there's my old obsession with Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. Again, the dress goes flat and then falls, and there's an edge around it that creates this spatial description on two dimensions.

When I got very specific in my work, and it had nothing to do with Niagara Falls, I just did the edge. I used to call it the edge, and now I'm referring to it as a zip because, art historically, that's how people see it. It's my awe of spatial magnetism of two dimensions. Everything else on the canvas is movement, but then there is this flat space where everything quiets down. It's a transition from one side to the other. Color-wise, that can be very powerful. It's so loaded with possibilities.

JB: The speed of the descending water reminds me that we were grieving at the same time when your brother died and when my close friend Dawn [Clements] died. Shortly after, you did a painting with two vertical lines of hearts. I think that painting is really important. In relation to Niagara Falls, the water is moving along at a pretty good clip and then: ka-boom. Life seems to have this motion, and then something very sudden like death feels like a dividing line.

PG: Exactly. That's exactly what that was. Death slows us down. It makes everything stop. It just changes everything, and then it all starts up again.

JB: I used to have two of your [older] Niagara paintings that had a kind of spray paint on top. There was something about the speed of the foreground—this thing about speed seems to be really an obsession of yours, like everything's moving along until a sudden change.

PG: It's not exactly speed, but motion. Movement and motion, and yeah, change. Unpredictability. Movement is extreme.

I feel very comfortable in my body. I was an athlete as a kid, and it completely saved my childhood. I was so defiant, and I had no respect for authority. I was always in trouble. If it wasn't for sports, I would have been kicked out of every school.

JB: Look at a game of baseball. Nothing happens for the longest time. Then all of a sudden that ball is in orbit and everything changes. I actually think this is really central to your art.

PG: It really is. As an adult, it's not so much about sports specifically anymore, but in my mind, there's this constant movement. Constant observation and change, and whole lifetimes going by in your mind as you're walking or riding your bike. That interior dialogue is something I think a lot about now. Where does all this stuff come from? I think interior dialogues are akin to physical movement.

JB: So the interior dialogue relates to what's happening in the backgrounds of the paintings?

PG: Yes.

JB: And what about the tactile quality of your paintings? Particularly with the enamel.

PG: I'm really a literal person. I use water-based enamel. I loved oil paint as a student, and I used it for years, but now it just feels so static; it just sits there. As a kid I saw pictures of Jackson Pollock painting with cans of paint on the floor, and I thought, *That's what I'm doing. I'm painting with cans of paint.*

And now 50 years later, I am painting with cans of paint. I use very high-quality water-based enamel that comes in cans, and it's very fluid. It's very hard to control. That's why there's so many spills—I'm not doing it as a pretense. The paint is literal.

JB: Then there are these really fluid, lacy lines that dance across the surface.

PG: Yeah, I think of the word 'lace' when I look at them. It's really sweet that you use that word because, again, it's not planned. The marks are totally intuitive, but I think it's a very feminine interior dialogue. I'm not saying, 'Oh, women think like this and men think like that,' but that some of the marks are extremely traditionally feminine looking.

JB: I totally see that, but then they're also very muscular. It doesn't surprise me at all that you were and are an athlete, because they're very athletic paintings. They're very physical.

PG: Exactly. There was a review of my White Columns show in ARTnews where the writer described my paintings as bouncy and muscular. All my friends asked "Is he a friend of yours?" even though he had never met me. But he still picked those adjectives.

JB: I also see them as somewhat tied to Moira Dryer; there's this sense of exploration and the way the paint sits on the surface, and the way the grid breaks down in this weird, abstract way.

PG: I loved her work in the 80s when I was introduced to it, but I thought of it as way more conceptual than mine was. I like how they're so rhythmic; I just love anything that has rhythm. I'm inspired by artists like Kusama and Paul McCarthy—I feel they have their own language that is not a choice. That's something that I look for in my paintings, and if the rhythm is off or if it's not rhythmic, then it's not pleasing to me.

JB: Moira Dryer used casein on wood, which created this really powdery, fragile surface, and your surface is very much the opposite. Your paintings are very broad shouldered; a lot of muscle tone combined with sensitivity. It's a sudden burst of both emotion and physical activity.

PG: Yes, and it all comes from the most mysterious place. I've been drawing on lined paper ever since first grade. I'd get sent to the office, and the secretary would always give me penmanship paper and a pencil because she knew I liked drawing. I have always drawn with these lines; it's just a certain way that I organize space.

I have probably 5000 sheets of paper that I've drawn on around my house. There's this language in my painting that has been pouring out of me in some form or another for my entire life.

Someone on Instagram said, "Congratulations, Pam, you invented a language." I felt good about that, except I thought, "Oh, this is a language?"

I've been doing this for so long, it doesn't even feel like I invented it. I needed to figure out a lot of structural things. Subject matter wise, I realized it has to be *this*. As long as I'm painting this language, then I can explore color and composition and size and all kinds of other things.

Most of my titles are some version of "Niagara-USA-Canada." All great literature and art is tied closely to where it was made.

James D. Barron
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