

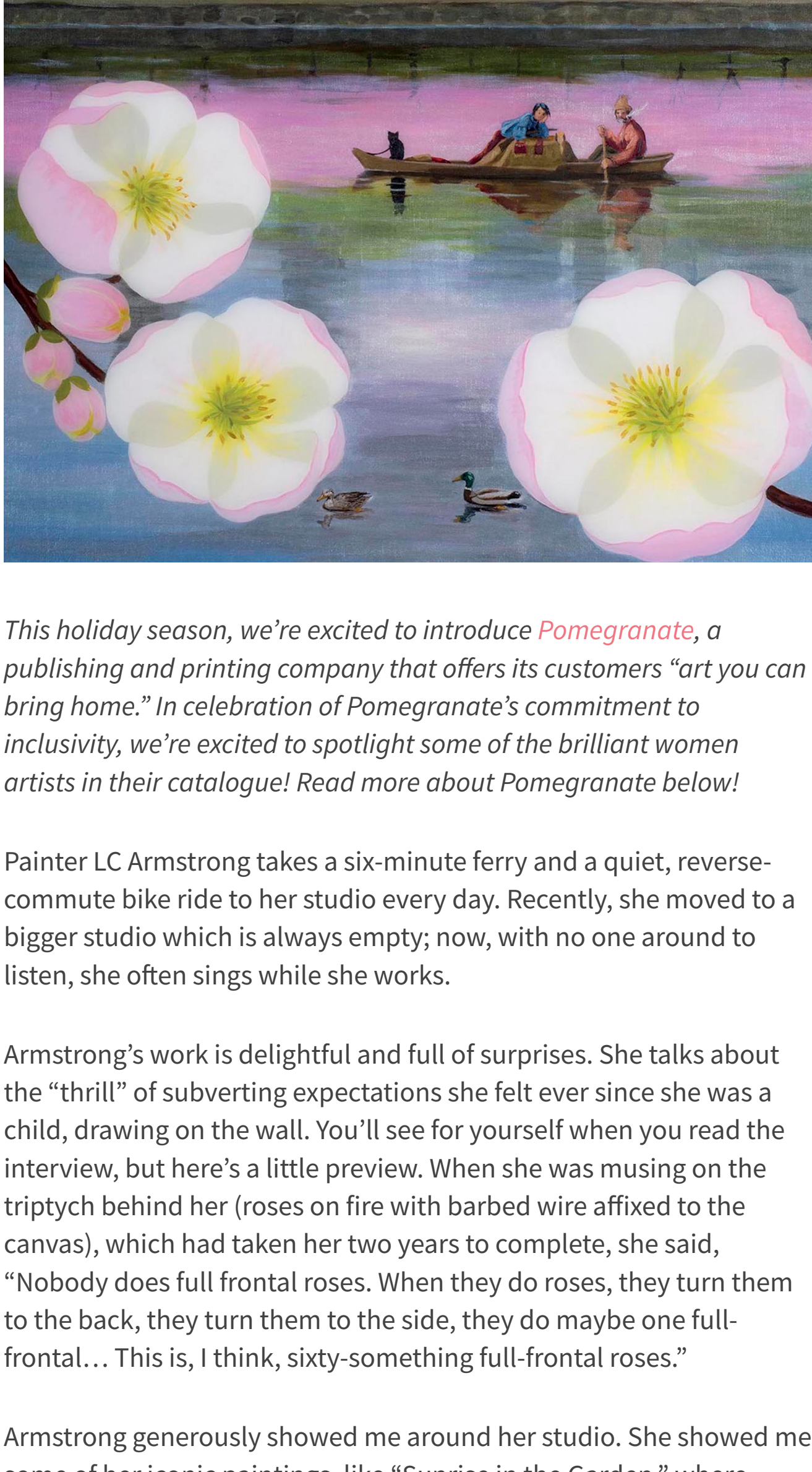


LC Armstrong Kept Her Crayons in a Cigar Box, and Other Delightful Details

by **Amelie Lasker**
15 HOURS AGO

ARTS: VISUAL ARTS INTERVIEWS

No comments



This holiday season, we're excited to introduce *Pomegranate*, a publishing and printing company that offers its customers "art you can bring home." In celebration of Pomegranate's commitment to inclusivity, we're excited to spotlight some of the brilliant women artists in their catalogue! Read more about Pomegranate below!

Painter LC Armstrong takes a six-minute ferry and a quiet, reverse-commute bike ride to her studio every day. Recently, she moved to a bigger studio which is always empty; now, with no one around to listen, she often sings while she works.

Armstrong's work is delightful and full of surprises. She talks about the "thrill" of subverting expectations she felt ever since she was a child, drawing on the wall. You'll see for yourself when you read the interview, but here's a little preview. When she was musing on the triptych behind her (roses on fire with barbed wire affixed to the canvases), which had taken her two years to complete, she said, "Nobody does full frontal roses. When they do roses, they turn them to the back, they turn them to the side, they do maybe one full-frontal... This is, I think, sixty-something full-frontal roses."

Armstrong generously showed me around her studio. She showed me some of her iconic paintings, like "Sunrise in the Garden," where animals drink from shining water behind vibrant tropical flowers. She showed me a more somber piece with white flowers in an abandoned garden. Several of her pieces lately have focused on existential challenges. One painting about climate change shows people—famous people, neighbors, Armstrong's family—holding the items they'd want to take with them in a great flood. Another painting, her first political one, is a triptych, telling the story of Covid in the US in the frame of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

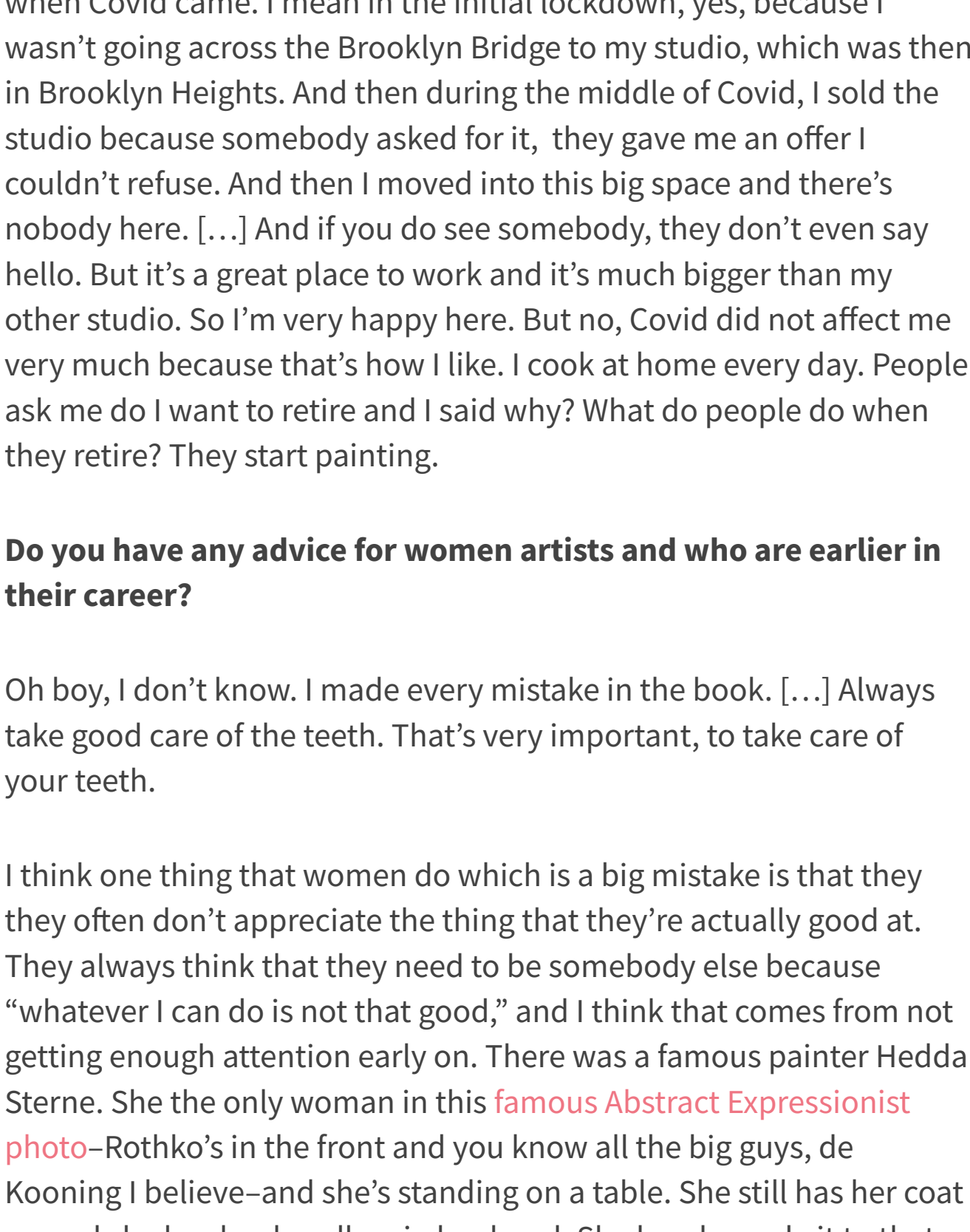
Here are excerpts from my conversation with LC Armstrong.

How has your art practice changed throughout your career? Why did you choose to make the recent switch from acrylics to oil?

I've switched [materials] several major times in my life. I started out as a sign painter because my father had a neon business in Venice, California and he had me working there as a little child laborer. I put myself through art school painting signs and customizing cars and I've got that skill set. Then at Art Center [at Pasadena's Art College] I got a degree in illustration. That was the only degree at that time where you could get all the figure drawing and color theory and classical artist training, because the fine arts department were all into minimalism and conceptualism.

I came to New York in the early 80s and worked as an illustrator and I made a ton of money and I absolutely hated my life. So I decided to go back to art school. My then-boyfriend wanted to go to San Francisco and he was an industrial designer. So I went to San Francisco Art Institute, where I cried for three days because I missed New York. [There] I got the other side, I got the fine art and conceptual art. I also did sculpting and I learned to weld there.

When I came [back] to New York, [I was] working as an artist assistant for \$6 an hour, thank you very much. From making as an illustrator almost \$100 grand my first year... to that. But that's how I met the most important people who helped my career. At that time I was already 35; I started showing and I didn't go into any little group shows. My first real show was in Cologne, and Sophia Unger's gallery, she put me in this fabulous group show with great German artists and women, all women. Then a year later she gave me my first solo show, and then the year after that I was in the corporate and biannual and everybody said, "How did she do that? How did she go from nothing?" But I was a very ripe tomato, let's say.



"I've grown—as we all have, hopefully—much more aware of the environment. Sort of like the Hudson River School, [the idea that] if you present the landscape, people will understand a little bit more how much is at stake." – LC Armstrong on painting "Sunrise in the Garden"

Was there a point when you decided to be an artist?

I remember the very first day I drew on the wall, I was three years old. I also knew that I was not supposed to draw on the wall. Maybe that's why it was so exciting.

I always knew I was an artist, but I was poor. My mother was trying to raise three of us kids on a hairdresser's salary. So I had the smallest box of crayons. I had five colors. I was the best artist in the classroom. So the other kids used to give me their broken crayons. I had them in a box of cigars—now I realize how funny this was, Dutch Masters Cigars.

Has the pandemic changed your art practice?

Everybody must think my life is horrible because nothing changed when Covid came. I mean in the initial lockdown, yes, because I wasn't going across the Brooklyn Bridge to my studio, which was then in Brooklyn Heights. And then during the middle of Covid, I sold the studio because somebody asked for it, they gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. And then I moved into this big space and there's nobody here. [...] And if you do see somebody, they don't even say hello. But it's a great place to work and it's much bigger than my other studio. So I'm very happy here. But no, Covid did not affect me very much because that's how I like. I cook at home every day. People ask me do I want to retire and I said why? What do people do when they retire? They start painting.

Do you have any advice for women artists and who are earlier in their career?

Oh boy, I don't know. I made every mistake in the book. [...] Always take good care of the teeth. That's very important, to take care of your teeth.

I think one thing that women do which is a big mistake is that they they often don't appreciate the thing that they're actually good at. They always think that they need to be somebody else because "whatever I can do is not that good," and I think that comes from not getting enough attention early on. There was a famous painter Hedda Sterne. She the only woman in this famous Abstract Expressionist photo—Rothko's in the front and you know all the big guys, de Kooning I believe—and she's standing on a table. She still has her coat on and she has her handbag in her hand. She barely made it to that photo shoot because nobody told her until the last minute. You should look it up.

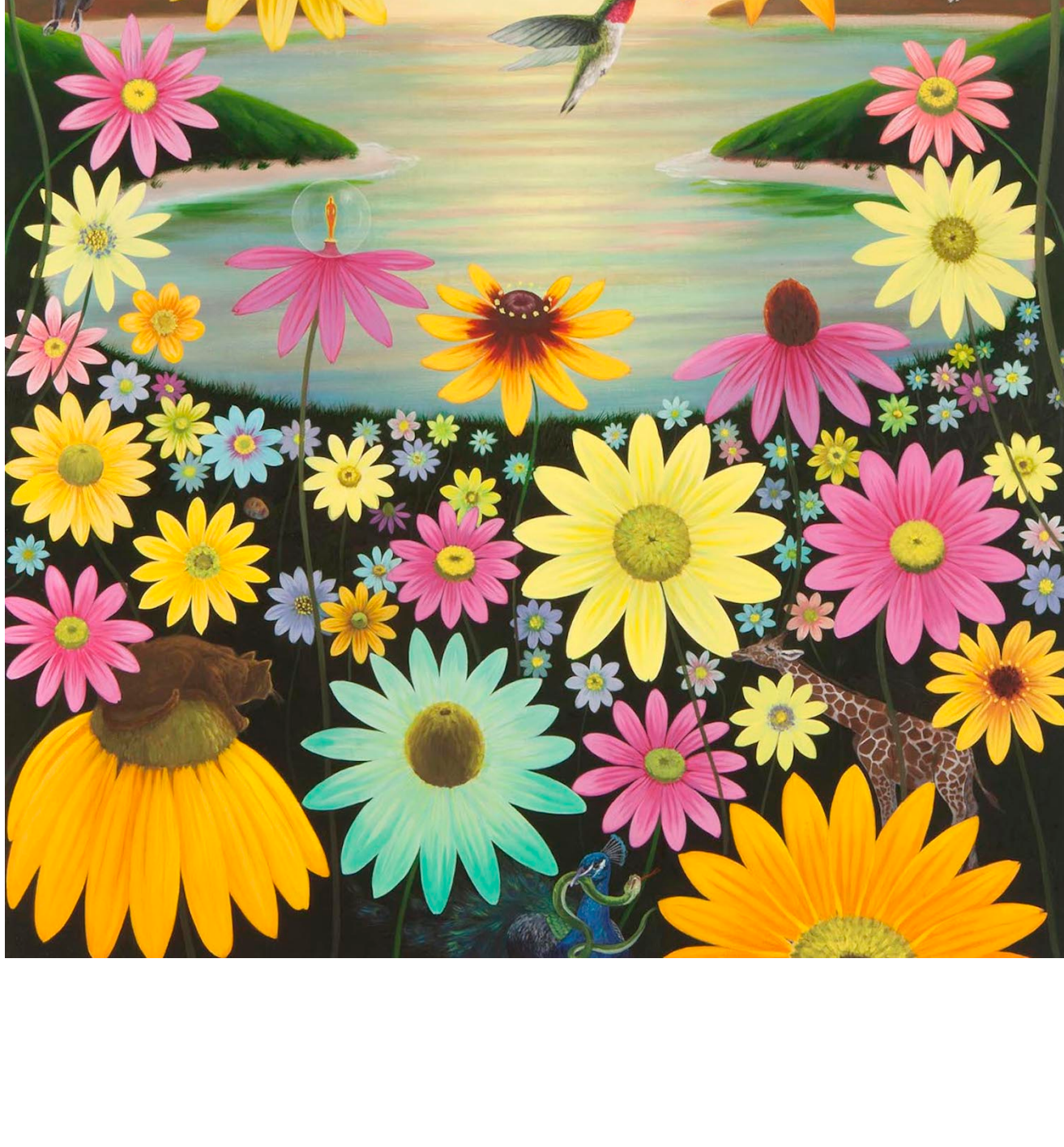
It made me so angry because her own dealer said, "She kept changing her style." Well guess what: when men do it, they're geniuses, right? If we want changes, "She's fickle." Look how many times Picasso changed his style and went back and started doing things he did 30 years before because he needed to make more work. Nobody cared. Women have to trust themselves and stand by their guns and change if they want to. But don't change because they don't believe in their own work because nobody else has told them that it was any good.

And if you want to get married, which I don't encourage, it is possible to have children and be an artist, but it makes it much much harder.

I ran into my first dealer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. At the end, we just walked out from a fabulous Louise Bourgeois show. She was a great artist and she had three children. And this dealer said to me, "Women artists should not have children." And I had to bite my tongue really hard because I wanted to say, well, Louise Bourgeois had children. Look, she's the greatest artist ever, right?

So you know, those rules are not hard and fast. I don't like the double standard that guys can have children and be artists and women can't.

But yeah, [having a child] really did change my work. Color came into my life, and joy. The work always reflects where I am psychologically. The first paintings I've never shown after my sister's and mother's deaths. They're so dark, they're like Goya's Black Paintings. I think those are also some of my best, but you know, not something you want to put on your wall for sure.



Living in New York, where do you get to see flowers?

It's probably the lack of flowers that makes me want to paint them, especially in the gray and black of the winter here. The greatest colorists were the Dutch in the Golden Age, they called it. Because, if you've ever been to Holland, it rains almost every day and it's gray and it's gray and it's gray—they value the tulips. [...] If I actually had a garden all year round or I was surrounded by color, I'd probably want to paint concrete and black.

[My now husband] had an apartment on the Upper West Side and I would go for walks and I passed this community gardens and I just thought these are so fascinating, they're so much more interesting than these designer gardens where everything is the right height and you know, tall people in the back, short people in front, and analogous color schemes. It's really predictable. Here, people work with their little plots and they put whatever they want on their little piece of land and it's like, to me [this community garden] was like a fantastic New York cocktail party where you have people from everywhere and all ages and all different races. To me it was more interesting. And I thought if I'm paying that much attention to this, maybe there's something in it for me.

And then stupid, you know, five years later, I go, oh, duh, I was pregnant and I'm making flowers. And you know, in the trajectory of my life, that always happens to me: I don't even know why I'm doing something until later. I look back, and it's so clear that when I was getting a divorce, I did a sculpture that was a bed of nails, but it was pencils—I thought it was about communication, but it was less about communication than it was about the divorce.

Well, I'll be interested to find out what the stuff you're working on now means in in 5 to 10 years!

I think it's more important what it means to the viewer. I leave it open enough that everyone can bring their own concepts to it and it should be able to trigger them just to think about things. I'm not trying to tell everybody how to think. Although I did in one painting—the Covid painting was the first political painting I've done.

Tell me about why you love New York so much.

When I came here, I felt like I'd come home. [...] I love the freedom of the place. The way that there's so many different people and whatever your plan, is you can find it.

A new LC Armstrong 2022 Wall Calendar is available for purchase on Pomegranate.com. [Check it out here!](#) Please note that more of your money goes to the artists if you purchase directly from Pomegranate.

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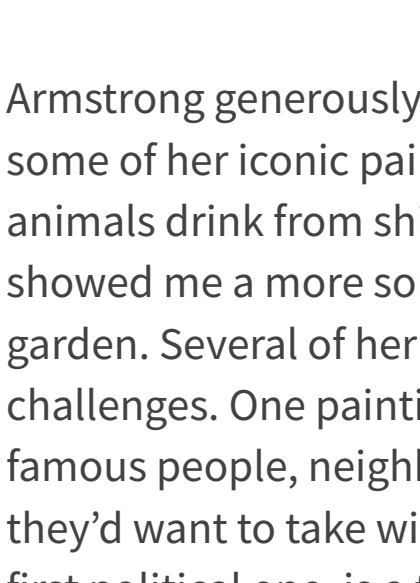
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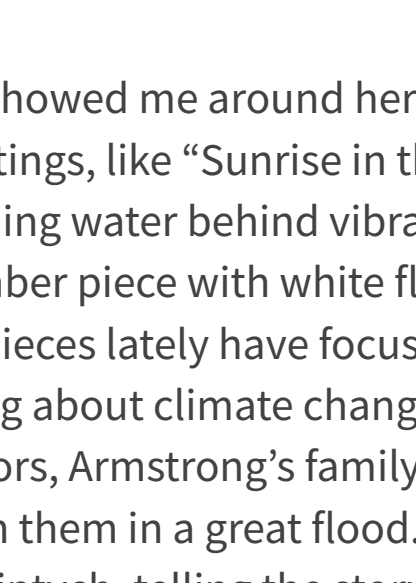
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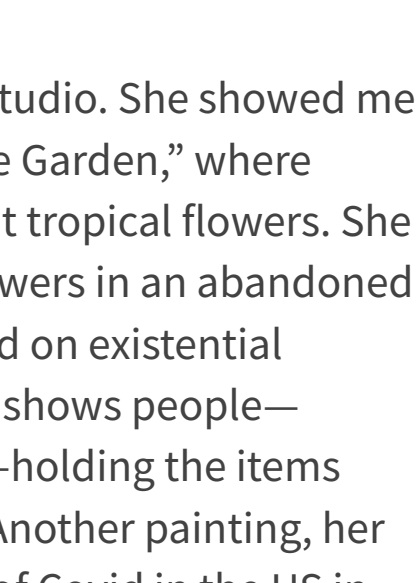
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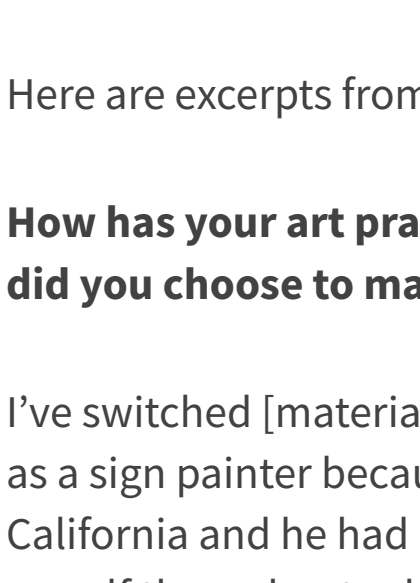
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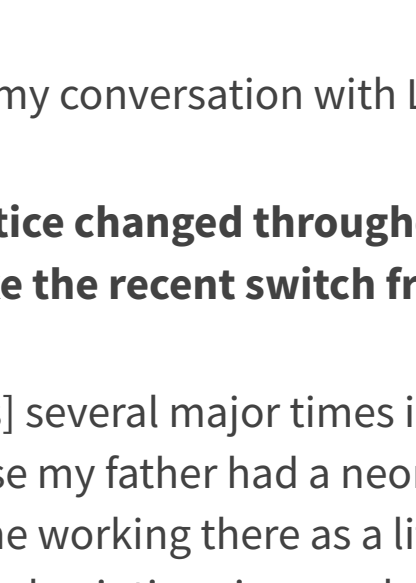
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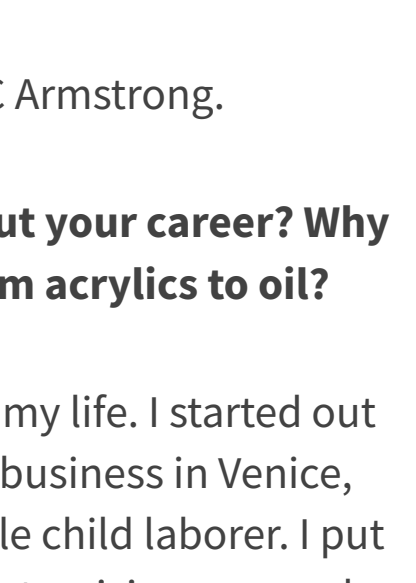
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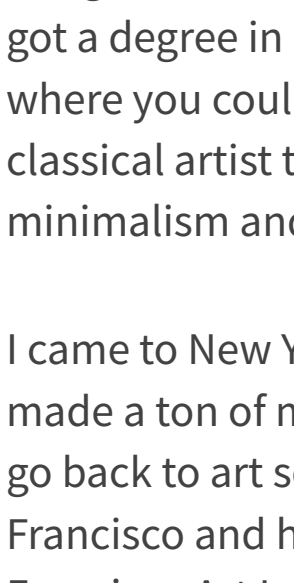
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by **Amelie Lasker**
NOVEMBER 17, 2021

Amelie Lasker joined FF2 Media in early 2016 after graduating from Columbia University where she studied English and history. She has written plays and had readings for Columbia's student-written theatre company Nomads, edited the blog for Columbia's film journal Double Exposure, and worked on film crews and participated in workshops at Columbia University Film Productions. She spent junior year abroad at Cambridge University, where she had many opportunities for student playwrights to see their work produced.

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