

# Lydia Johnston's abstractions

Familiar  
yet ambiguous

**I**MMERSE YOURSELF and be transported" is Lydia Johnston's intent for everyone interacting with her art. And immersing in Johnston's world is a thrilling and expansive prospect. I grow both more introspective and equally undefined as I interact with her work,

## GALLERY GLIDER

By Virginia Clark

finding unsuspected elements and sudden intuitions as I peruse her fascinating layering and shadows, suggestive constructions and the odd line, flush or squiggle here or there.

Increasingly abstract in her subjective explorations, she won the People's Choice Best of Show for 2D Works award in the Millicent Rogers Miniature Show last January 2021. Previously, "Out of The Blue" took an enviable second place at the 2019 Taos Fall Arts Festival, and where juror Andrea Pichaida said the work's elements "transport the viewer into a world of dance, happiness with music, warmth and togetherness ... " — perfectly stated.

Taos' light and wide-open skies hooked her immediately Johnston says when she first moved here in 2015, and she is as jazzed by it all now as when she first arrived. Originally a textile artist, Johnston is a self-taught painter represented at magpie Taos Gallery, and also in Massachusetts and New York.

"Now more than ever I really believe in the power of art to better our lives and Lydia Johnston's work does just that," says gallerist/artist Georgia Gersh about Johnston, whom she has repped at magpie Taos since last year. "Her paintings have a deep mystery, they allude to the familiar while remaining ambiguous. By hinting at things, Lydia intrigues the viewer, allowing a profound connection with the images. Her play with color and composition is nothing short of magical."

Before lockdowns, Johnston was represented at Paseo Norte Gallery, where magpie Taos is now located, in the formerly renowned Act One Gallery. Gersh said for some reason, Johnston



COURTESY IMAGE

Lydia Johnston is increasingly abstract in her subjective explorations on canvas which have been described as "magical."

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## GEORGIA GERSH

Gallerist/artist

is the only artist held over from Paseo Norte, but she feels honored showing the work.

"They are a perfect fit, rich in color which is right up my alley, yet they are totally different from any other artist that I represent. Their beauty and intimacy takes their audience to another place, familiar yet fantastical; a coastline or a city street that we

to explore new ideas, experiment and take risks," she said by phone from Boston last week where she has been visiting her kids and 20-month-old grandson. "It has let me figure out what really makes me feel alive, what excites me most. A few years ago I was doing quite a bit of mark-making and printing on my oil paintings and then I let that go. I realized that's something I want to bring back into my paintings, it adds a dimension that I'm really finding exciting."

She's learned one of the most important things is to pay attention to how you're feeling when you're painting, when something excites you and makes you feel alive, follow that. Follow the "yeses," she says, and if you don't like something, stay away from it, all of which has brought so much more joy in her painting.

Last week a friend entered her piece, "Rain Dance" into the Members Open exhibit now at Encore Gallery of the Taos Center for the Arts, that continues through Feb. 28.

TCA Executive Director Colette LaBouff says in an email at press time, "2022 in the Encore Gallery begins with a community and beloved show, the Members Open. TCA has chosen the elements as a theme; we look forward to seeing how artists interpret this. TCA hopes to see the work of those Taos artists who have always participated in this exhibition. And TCA wants to extend a special invite to those who have never participated — we want to see your work at the Encore."

Johnston definitely plans to be at the opening reception today (see info box), which is why she's flying home Sunday, Jan. 9, for her first in-person artist reception in two years.

Starting Feb. 1, she and five Western U.S.A. women artists launch the virtual Chroma Collective Gallery (to be explored here in the future), dedicated to broadening their "creative circle — featuring the work of guest artists who inspire us alongside their own," (in February, see [chromacollectivegallery.com](http://chromacollectivegallery.com)).

For more immediate immersions, check Johnston out at [magpietaos.com](http://magpietaos.com), [lydiajohnston.com](http://lydiajohnston.com), Lydia Johnston's Fine Art on Facebook and [cataos.org](http://cataos.org).

could imagine going to, at least in our imagination. In the middle of winter, looking at Johnston's paintings literally makes me feel warmer."

"My artwork is intuitive," Johnston explains online. "What does this mean? Emergence: This means that when I start, I don't know where it will go. I lay on paint and trust myself that something exciting will emerge."

Her trust is palpable and otherworldly beautiful. "I start by laying on color — yellows, oranges, purples, blues. I want lots of layers, they add translucence and luminosity, depth and a richness. In addition to brushes, I work with wide color shapers, silicone tools similar to palette knives, that give my work its distinctive look, the angled and carved markings that add vitality and complexity."

## Uplifting lockdowns

Overall, Johnston thinks the COVID-19 pandemic has been good for artists. "Lockdown has given me the time