

“Jen Stark Interview”

Amanda Quinn Olivar / September 5, 2018



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— Jen Stark

Interview by Amanda Quinn Olivar, West Coast Editor

Jen Stark’s art is driven by her interest in conceptualizing visual systems to simulate plant growth, evolution, infinity, fractals, mimetic topographies, and sacred geometries. Using available materials—paper, wood, metal, paint—Stark strives to make work that balances on a razor’s edge of optical seduction and perceptual engagement. The resulting works often resemble organic, molecular, cloud-like structures, and are imbued with kinetic, undulating effects that serve to dislocate the viewer from staid reality into an immersive ecosphere of echoing patterns and the implausible designs found in nature. Even her vivid colors are in direct conversation with the natural world; the attractant/repellent properties of flowers encouraging pollination or insects warning birds of their poisonous traits, and the luminous mystery of phosphorescent sea creatures are among Stark’s concerns. Via these corporeal abstractions, spectators are led onto the astral plane; there’s a transcendence to Stark’s work where the vibrational phases become a sacrosanct and curative experience for the viewer. Traces of mandalas or nautili reveal themselves as sacred geometric forms in Stark’s spiritual reservoir.



*Infinity Spiral*, 2018 laser cut mirrored acrylic, epoxy, wood 96 x 96 x 3/4 in

Stark's ability to create atmospheric, minimal, naturalist configurations that only reveal themselves after deep engagement align her with the artistic legacies of Yayoi Kusama, Sol Lewitt, Tara Donovan, Tom Friedman, Andy Goldsworthy, Ernst Haeckel, and the Finish Fetish artists of 1960s Los Angeles. Not limited to the confines of museums and galleries, Stark's diverse practice—a series of sculptural objects that rely on a commitment to process and hypnotic repetition; charismatic wall works; widely seen murals; and intricately animated films—have been exhibited throughout the world.

Stark was born in Miami, Florida in 1983, and studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art, graduating in 2005. Since then, Stark has realized exhibitions globally, with major shows in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, Thailand, and Canada. Her work is in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the West Collection, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale and MOCA Miami, among others. Stark lives and works in Los Angeles.

**What was the aha moment that led you to art... and did Los Angeles play a part in your career decision?**

When I was very young my grandfather (who was a hobby artist) would invite me over to teach me how to paint with watercolors. He would paint things like waterbirds, landscapes and boats on water. One day during our painting session we decided to paint my Cabbage Patch Kid doll. We each painted a portrait our own version, and when we were finished he said, "Your's looks better than mine!" And I thought to myself "Wow, maybe I can really be an artist". Haha, I was probably 5 or 6 years old (and looking back now the painting was not very good, it was just such a thrill to get a compliment from my grandfather, who I looked up to).

From a young age I was always fascinated by painting and sculpture. Each morning I would wake up early before my family was up, and paint, create collages and draw. I grew up in Miami, FL, which was definitely an influence on my work. I moved to Los Angeles 6 years ago, and this city has given me lots of creative inspiration with my artwork. Being around so many creative people who are constantly being magnetized to this city is very exciting. It feels like an important time right now to live in LA.

## **How has living in LA informed your approach and aesthetic?**

Living in LA has helped to expand my ideas on fabrication and thinking about what artwork can be. There are so many possibilities to be able to create work using particular materials, with so many fabrication houses. The possibilities seem endless. Also living in LA has made me more open to the definition of what an artist can be. I'm diving into all different avenues of artwork like creating clothing, digital animations, public art, working with great brands, etc. It has made me realize I don't have to have one set path, I can create my own world. I use many different materials in my work, like wood, plastic, paint, metals, etc. I also work in the digital world with animation. The themes in my work are inspired by plant growth, evolution, infinity, fractals, mimetic topographies, and sacred geometries.

## **When and how did you first feel embraced by our LA art community?**

Only 3 months after I moved to LA (in 2012), I had a solo show at Martha Otero Gallery. It was my first solo show in LA. Alma Ruiz (the former senior curator at MOCA) led an art talk with me about my show. I felt so much support from the community, and it was an amazing introduction to the city. It felt so exciting and I'm happy I've become a part of the LA art community.

## **The exhibition speaks about the vitality of our art community. Which pioneering LA artist influenced you the most? And whose work do you find intriguing right now?**

The pioneering artist that influenced me the most would probably be James Turrell. I love his use of color, light, nature and space. Some of my favorite artists are ones who use simple but brilliant ways to express the world around them or show a different perspective. Currently I'm inspired by the work of Yayoi Kusama, Sol Lewitt, Tara Donovan, Tom Friedman, Andy Goldsworthy & Ernst Haeckel.

## **What is your favorite art accident?**

My favorite art accident was when I was studying abroad during college in the south of France. I didn't have much money to purchase art supplies so I got one of the most affordable mediums: a stack of construction paper. I took it back to the studio and began experimenting with it. That's when I began creating my signature multi-layered shapes and ideas. Having this budget constraint made me think out of the box and transform this material and my own ideas. Necessity is the mother of invention.