

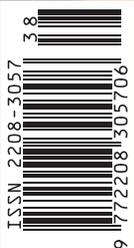
Vault™

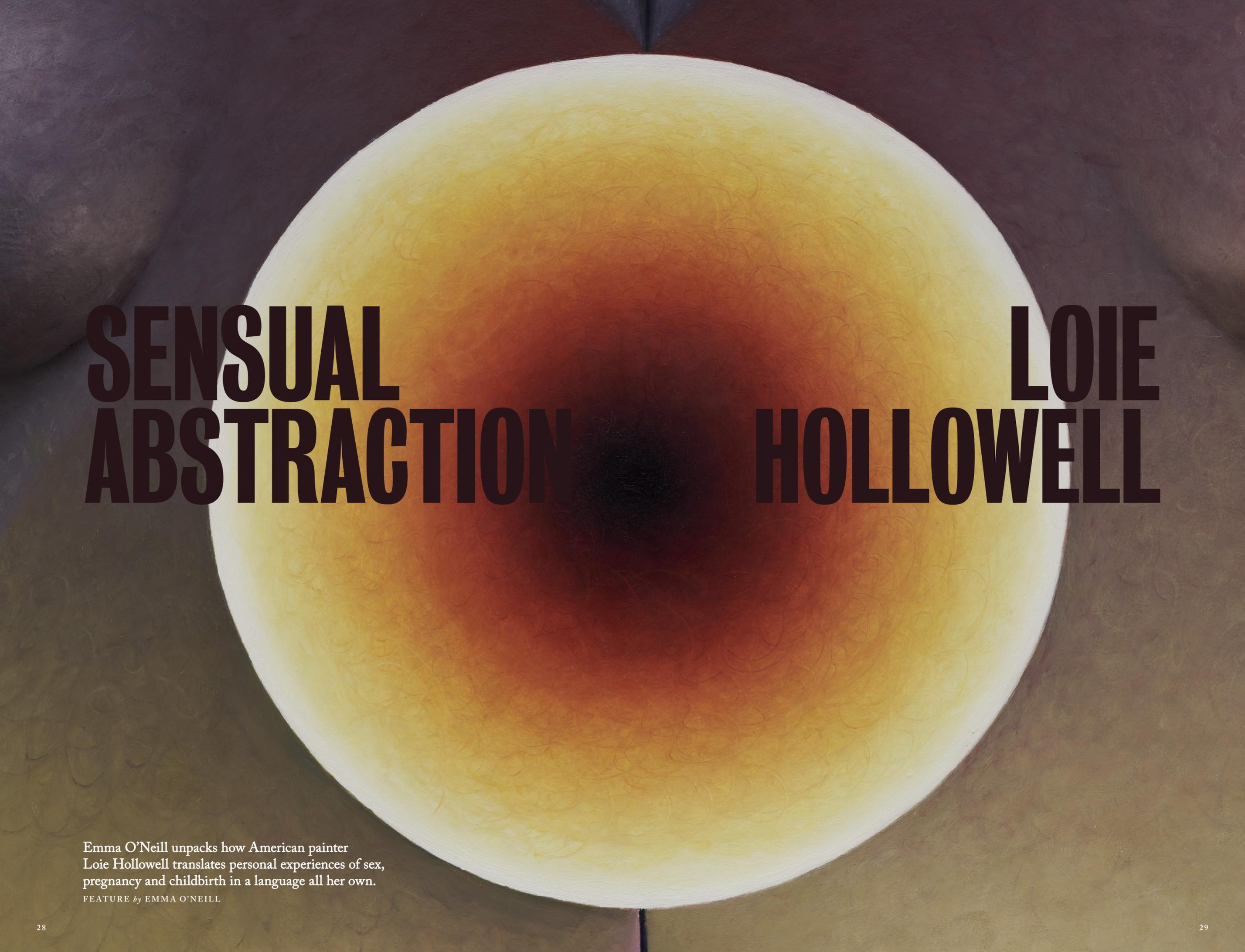
Australasian Art & Culture

SEX ISSUE 38 · MAY to JULY 2022

Troy-Anthony Baylis, Robert Andy Coombs, Robert Crumb,
John Currin, Gerwyn Davies, Tom of Finland, Jenna Gribbon,
Loie Hollowell, Sanné Mestrom, Helmut Newton, Julia Robinson,
Aiko Robinson, EJ Son, Michelle Ussher, Paul Yore & more

AUS \$24.95 NZ \$29.95



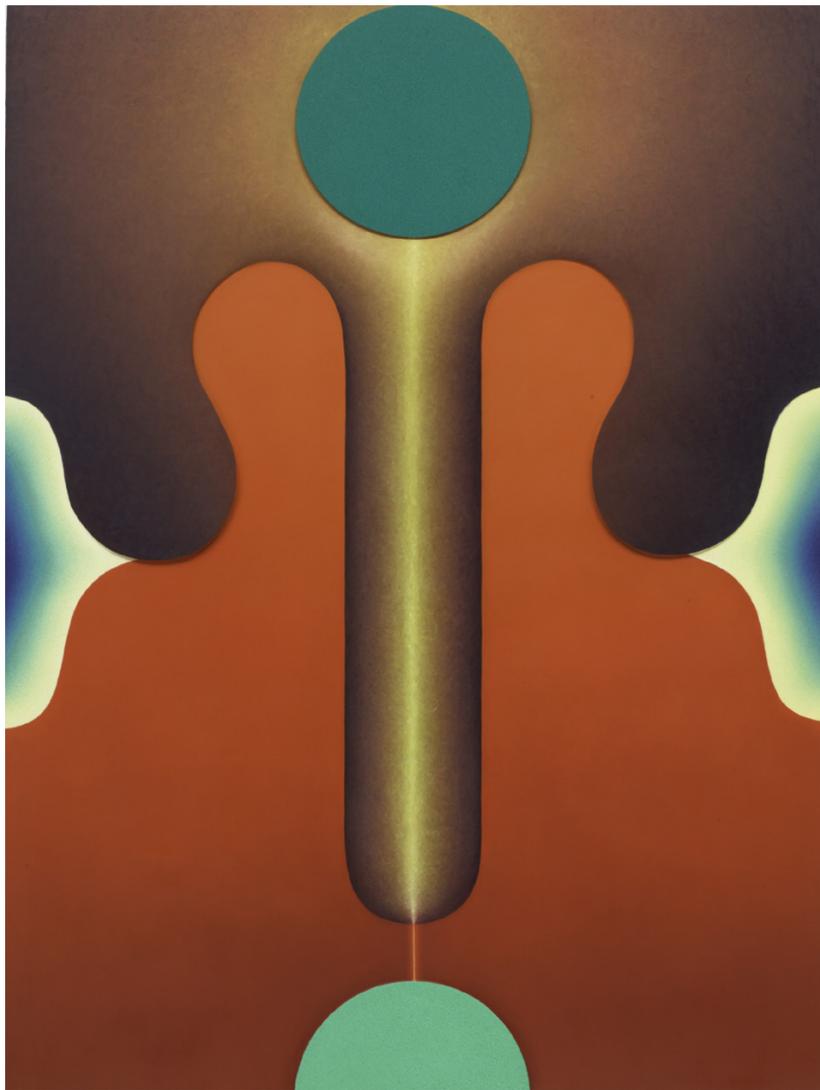


**SENSUAL
ABSTRACTION**

**LOIE
HOLLOWELL**

Emma O'Neill unpacks how American painter Loie Hollowell translates personal experiences of sex, pregnancy and childbirth in a language all her own.

FEATURE *by* EMMA O'NEILL



Head. Breast. Buttocks. Belly. Groin. These are the five elements at the centre of Loie Hollowell's investigation of the body, her own body in particular. Concentric circles emerge from each canvas like planets. Pendulous forms, crescents, ovals and spheres are tightly rendered in otherworldly palettes that bend and emanate light. In concert with colour, subtle sculptural elements direct the rise and fall of light.

Rendering the female body with a discreet vocabulary of shapes, Hollowell's practice hovers between abstraction and figuration. The geometrical compositions depict not only the physical body, but also the psychological space of the body itself. Above all, they chart personal experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and sex. *Point of Entry* (lingam between teal circles) (2017), for example, presents the moment of penetration during sex. The composition depicts a large golden phallus moving towards a turquoise sphere against a cherry-red foreground.

Hollowell's oeuvre reads like a timeline of her life, undulating bellies accompanied her own pregnancies and explicit references to breastfeeding followed as subject matter. *Trickle Down* (2020) depicts the latter. Five cantaloupe-coloured semicircles emerge from a central white dividing

line, lactating into a swirling foreground of lathered greys and open mouths.

The artist's steep incline from artist-run space to auction house is testament to the impact of her paintings. In 2015, a chance encounter with her former professor Ridley Howard led to an exhibition at his Brooklyn artist-run space 106 Green. At the time, *New York Times* critic Martha Schwendener prophesied: "The next time you see Loie Hollowell's paintings it will probably not be in a small, artist-run gallery in someone's apartment that is open only on Sundays." She was correct. It wasn't long before Hollowell was the youngest artist in the stable of Pace Gallery, New York. In December last year, the artist's *Lick Lick* (2018) broke a personal record of HKD 14,650,000 at Christie's 20th/21st Century Art Evening Sale.

Art historian and writer Elizabeth Buhe first encountered Hollowell's work in 2016. She attributes the success of the artist's work in part to the fact that "early on, Hollowell hit on a way to marry the use of abstraction in a phenomenological and sculptural way with the body." A scholar of abstraction, Buhe says: "What's exciting about Hollowell's work is that she continually uses her embodied experience to reinvent abstraction in her own language. She manages to engender a type of bodily relation to the paintings for both herself and for the beholder. Upon viewing the 2019 *Plumb Line* paintings, for instance, we feel attached to the paintings as if through an umbilical cord."

Hollowell's practice, across a number of mediums, has always emerged from the female form. Trained in sculpture and performance art at the University of California in Santa Barbara, the artist's early feminist-driven nude performances carried into her painting practice. While Hollowell originally used sawdust to hand-build the sculptural surfaces of her work, she now uses archival materials to manipulate the rise and fall of light around each piece more precisely. Now, the sculptural elements are created from high-density foam shapes, which are digitally rendered, milled and adhered to linen panels before the painting begins.

Prior to the birth of her first child, Hollowell recorded the growth of her swelling belly via the language of geometric painting familiar to her. *Pregnant Red* (2018), for example, depicts a changing body broken into modular parts. Of her second pregnancy, she says, "I realised I needed to be much more direct in my visual language to explore the new, more visceral state of mind I was in during this time. And so, I actually started trying to depict my pregnant breast and belly in a realistic way in pastel drawings ... From there I eventually began to use the cast I had created of my own body when pregnant with my first child, which I had originally made just

Top to bottom, left to right
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Lick Lick, 2018
oil paint, acrylic medium, sawdust and high-density foam on linen mounted on panel
121.9 x 91.4 x 8.3 cm
Photo: Mark Waldhauser

LOIE HOLLOWELL
Postpartum belly void, May 27, 2020
soft pastel and graphite on paper
66 cm x 50.8 cm
Photo: Melissa Goodwin

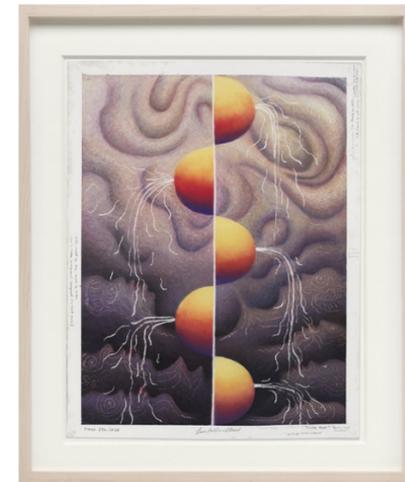
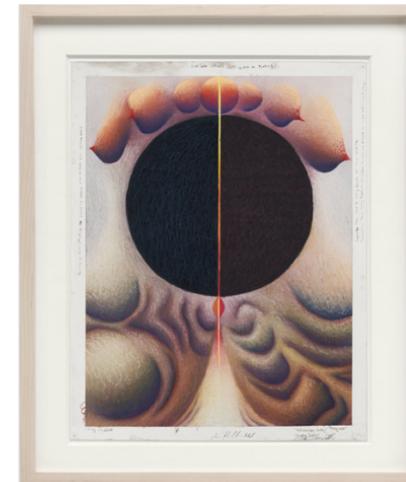
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Trickle Down, March 24, 2020
soft pastel and graphite on paper
66 cm x 50.8 cm
Photo: Melissa Goodwin

Opposite, top to bottom
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Point of Entry (lingam between teal circles), 2017
oil paint, acrylic medium, sawdust, and high-density foam on linen mounted on panel
121.9 x 91.4 x 8.9 cm
Photo: Kerry Ryan McFate and Tom Barratt

LOIE HOLLOWELL
Horizon on my pit of Hell, 2019
oil paint, acrylic medium, and high density foam on linen over panel
71.1 x 53.3 x 5.1 cm
Photo: Melissa Goodwin

Page 28-29
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Colostrum well (Cambria and Loie) (detail), 2021
oil, acrylic medium, epoxy resin on linen over panel
53.7 x 54 x 12.7 cm
Photo: Melissa Goodwin

Courtesy Pace Gallery
© Loie Hollowell



to have as a document of myself. This was the first time I took casts of body parts and put them on the painting surface." At that point, her practice became as much about portraiture as it is about the issues, ideas and experiences of birthing and motherhood.

More recently, the artist has taken to casting the bodies of friends as well as her own. Highly detailed aqua resin casts allow for the smaller imperfections, divots and dimples of the skin to seep through onto otherwise smooth surfaces and hard-edged shapes. The sculptural

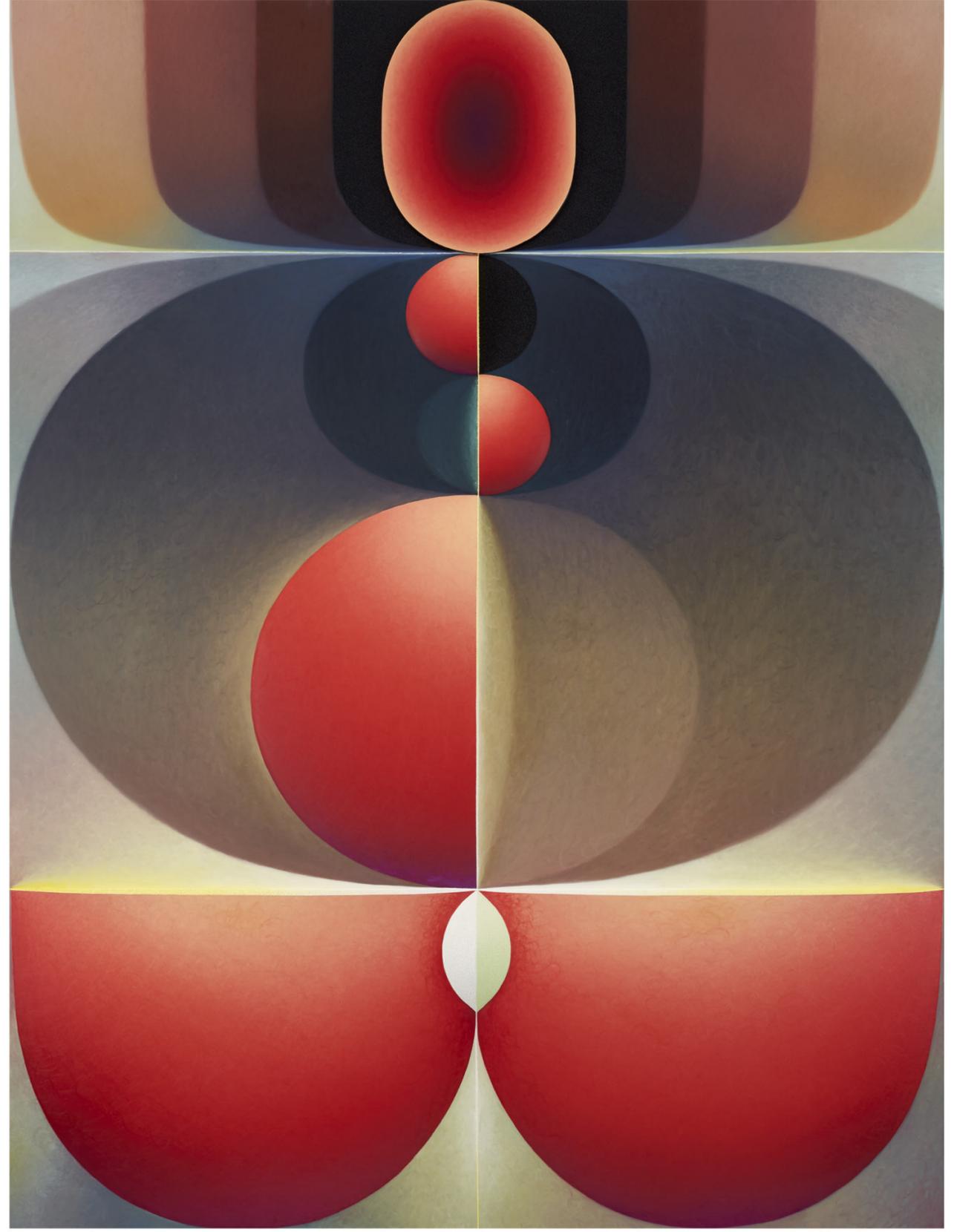
elements are fixed directly onto the surface of the canvas and become the narrative engine of each piece. "I am interested in how something dimensional sitting on the surface can alternatively become a recessive element due to how it is colored and textured in juxtaposition with the flat areas of the painting," Hollowell tells me. "Ultimately, the built-up surface permits a deeper investigation into the figure-ground relationship."

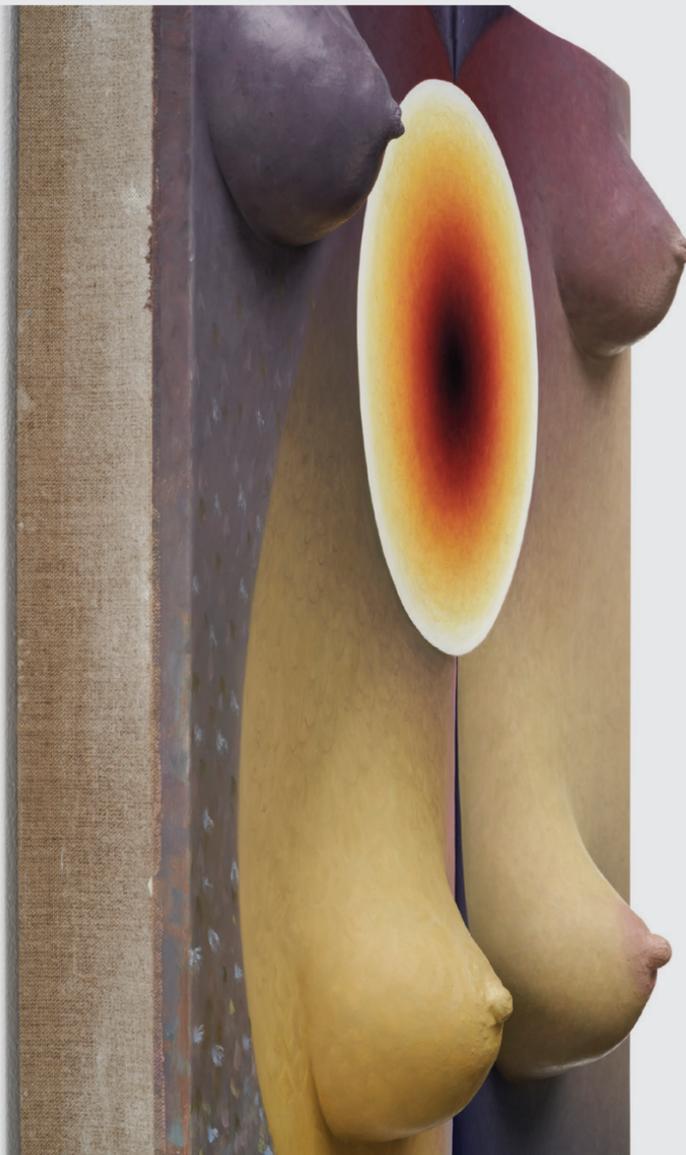
As well as higher precision body casts, the introduction of new bodies has, in the artist's words, "allowed for significantly more diverse and really fun formal explorations into abstraction, organic shape and composition, since each of our bodies are extremely different in size and structure." In pieces such as *Colostrum well (Cambria and Loie)* (2021), the variation in shapes works against the geometric principles used to depict body parts previously.

While some of the titles of the paintings point to the source material (*Horizon on my Pit of Hell*, 2019, for example, depicts the "fiery" burn of childbirth), the pleasure of Hollowell's work is that you're often excused from having to 'know' more than you already recognise. Instead, we are given license to be inundated with the immaculate



HOLLOWELL'S OEUVRE READS LIKE A TIMELINE OF HER LIFE, UNDULATING BELLIES ACCOMPANIED HER OWN PREGNANCIES AND EXPLICIT REFERENCES TO BREASTFEEDING FOLLOWED AS SUBJECT MATTER.

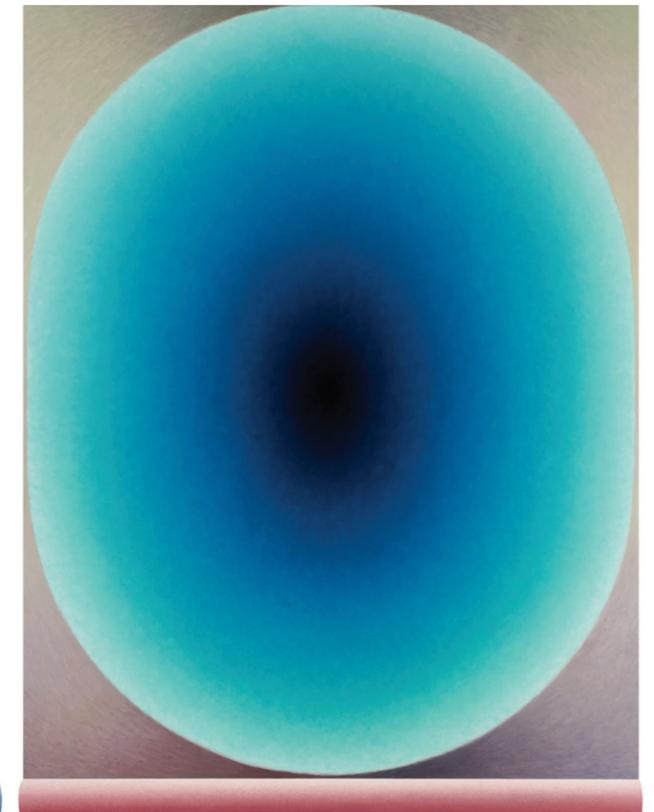
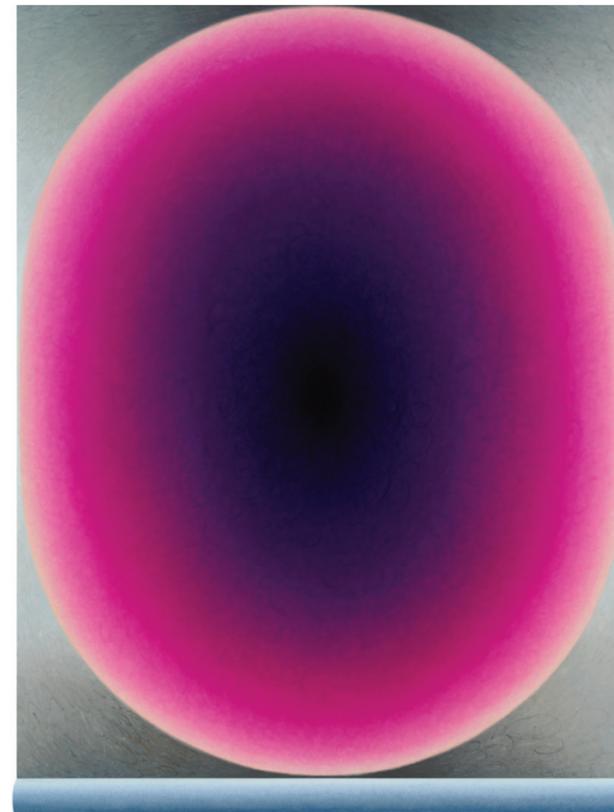




colour gradients, to float along the rippling shapes towards clues of bodily forms and to move around each canvas to investigate the fine rise and fall of shadow from subtle sculptural additions.

When I speak with her, Hollowell's studio is busy. In the old red brick row building (an ex-knitting factory) live-in neighbours footsteps are heard overhead and the studio cat stalks a family of mice while the artist prepares for three upcoming shows. First up is a solo showcase at Pace Gallery's Seoul outpost in May 2022. The exhibition will feature pared back "brain paintings," which explore the psychological experience of colour. Consisting simply of the oval shape to represent the head, *Fuschia Brain* and *Teal Brain* (both 2021) are rendered in gradients that offer a journey inward both formally and metaphorically. Later in the year, the artist is set to exhibit a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santa Barbara, followed by a group of new paintings in early 2023 at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at UC Davis.

The two immediate upcoming shows represent antithetical directions. "The work I've been making for the past six years or so has fluctuated between these two spaces, being both minimal and bodily,



Left to right
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Fuschia Brain (detail), 2021
oil paint, acrylic medium
and high density foam on
linen over panel
182.9 x 137.2 x 9.5 cm

LOIE HOLLOWELL
Teal Brain (detail), 2021
oil paint, acrylic medi-
um and wood on linen
over panel
182.9 x 137.2 x 8.9 cm

Opposite, top to bottom,
all images
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Colostrum well (*Cambria
and Loie*) (detail), 2021
oil, acrylic medium, epoxy
resin on linen over panel
53.7 x 54 x 12.7 cm

Page 32
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Pregnant Red (detail), 2019
oil paint, acrylic medium
and high density foam on
linen mounted on panel
183.5 x 137.5 x 9.5 cm

Page 33
LOIE HOLLOWELL
Pregnant Red, 2019
oil paint, acrylic medium
and high density foam on
linen mounted on panel
183.5 x 137.5 x 9.5 cm
Photos: Melissa Goodwin

Courtesy Pace Gallery
© Loie Hollowell

and now I've taken these two elements and separated them into two distinctive bodies," explains Hollowell. "These latest iterations push the two concepts to extremes – in one, incorporating literal bodies and in the other, flattening into pure colour experiments."

Among the first generation of artists who grew up with the internet, the perfection of Hollowell's gradients and perfectly formed shapes translates exquisitely on screen. Still, the illusory nature of each piece adds a playful, performative aspect especially reserved for those who see the work in-person. In addition to the sculptural elements, the tactility of the paintings arises from her application of paint. Seen close-up, tiny, almost manic, swirling motions add to the refraction of light.

Upon first glance, many of Hollowell's compositions are familiar, situated as they are in the lineage of American artists such as Agnes Pelton, Georgia O'Keeffe and Judy Chicago, with nods to the Californian Light and Space Movement and the Abstract Classicists of Hollowell's home state. The artist also calls on Neotantric painters such as G.R. Santosh yet despite the meditative aspects of her compositions, she denies any spiritual affiliation. Rather, the artist pivots from

the Neotantric use of modernist painting concepts to depict the body in geometric and symbolic modular elements. Though Hollowell's practice shares the concerns of many of these artists, the confluence of art history and personal autobiography create a visual lexicon all her own.

"I am simply making images of the body," Hollowell says. "And I'm not focused on the body's relationship to its surroundings, I am interested in the psychological space of the body itself." It is this unapologetic and direct approach, Buhe comments, that characterises the artist. "It's not that she can't see outside of that experience, but rather she finds it to be truthful ... This is the body she has, this is the experience that she has at her fingertips: as a woman, a mother, as the partner of a sculptor. For anyone who has grown in a female body, given birth or breastfed, these things are real and the tactility of embodiment manifests directly in the work." **V**

loiehollowell.com

Loie Hollowell is represented by Pace Gallery, New York.
pacegallery.com