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May/June 2018

Free or \$5.99 mailed copy



# LAYERS & LIGHT

## JOHNSON AND MEHTA AT BEACON

While much of what a gallery owner or curator does goes unseen – the behind-the-scenes tasks of running an arts business – to me, one of the primary jobs of this profession is making connections. It is the connections found between

required to do this – as is a solid art background and a good eye.

What will resonate with the audience? How will the artists complement or contrast with one another, and what is the current artistic trend? These are all

stable and, of course, the next big opening exhibition.

At Beacon Gallery, which recently opened on Boston's Harrison Avenue, Christine O'Donnell has been making connections. Having traveled and lived in Paris, Hong Kong and

### FEATURED GALLERY

**LAYERS & LIGHT: THE ARTWORK OF AJA JOHNSON AND LORI MEHTA**

**BEACON GALLERY**  
524B HARRISON AVENUE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
MAY 4 THROUGH JUNE 16



Aja Johnson, *Little Girls*.

artists, their work, the public and the art market that can infect an audience with enthusiasm (or not) and can bring art to life. A certain amount of sophistication is

considerations; but sometimes the connections are less obvious and need to be mined. The finale of bringing together these elements results in a unique and growing artist

Singapore, O'Donnell chose Boston as the place to embark upon her love for art and her ambition to run a business. The gallery's next show, "Layers & Light: The Artwork of Aja





Lori Mehta, *Thought Process*.



Lori Mehta, *Sightlines*.

Johnson and Lori Mehta," opening on May 4, displays the finesse of her ability to make connections which might otherwise have gone unseen.

Mehta, a representational artist, and Johnson, whose work is abstract, provided what O'Donnell said was "both a challenge and a delight" with regard to putting together the show.

Johnson and Mehta's works appeared together for the first time in Beacon Gallery's "First Look 2018" show. "The colors and forms of some of the pieces complemented each other really well in that show, despite the difference in the two artists' styles. Nonetheless, seeing Johnson's and Mehta's work adjacent to each other in a group show is a far cry from creating a two-artist show," explained O'Donnell.

"While my instinct said that they

would show well together on a larger scale, there remained the challenge of curating their work and actually proving this true. And yet, in this challenge has also been the delight," she said. "As Johnson and Mehta have shown their work to me over the previous months, the connections in their paintings have only become more evident: in the colors and the forms they use, as well as in the subtlety of their styles – their work seem to vibrate with a similar energy."

Mehta and Johnson, both local to the Boston area, have been with O'Donnell since the gallery opened in November 2017. The theme of layers of light runs through both artist's works.

Mehta paints a diverse range of subjects – portraiture, street scenes

and still life – using both subtle strokes and broad gestures in her brush work. Using layers of color, as well as shadow and light, her paintings capture moments in time and the emotions of her subjects.

Beginning with photographs, Mehta makes color notations which she feels are important to catch the subtleties which might get lost in a photo. Using a bright under painting, she then begins drawing, which takes the majority of her process time. The two or three days spent drawing, she says, gives her time to reflect on shape and prepare for painting.

"Someone once described my strokes as both wild and considered, and this really resonated with me ... it is an accurate description of how I work," Mehta explained. "I also paint with the board upside down. In





doing so, I am no longer thinking figuratively, but instead looking for shapes and values."

Despite this process and the angular nature of her work, Mehta is still able to successfully capture the mood and personality of her subjects. A wonderful example of this is her work entitled "Thought Process." Her still lifes are of substance and well-grounded.

Johnson's abstract work also features layers of light as well as a complementary palette. Johnson tells me that before even meeting one another at the gallery's inaugural show, both artists had been quite taken with each other's work and had hoped to show together.

"Obviously, our work is very different - different styles, different subject matter, etc. - but I noticed right away that despite these differences, there was a very interesting thread of similarity," said Johnson.

"Our color palettes are complementary, we both build up layers of paint to construct the final composition, and I think both of our work relies on the balance of

negative and positive space. That's my favorite aspect of Lori's work - the way she uses her negative space and almost flips into the positive."

Johnson creates her work by building her paintings slowly, often returning again and again to the canvas to obtain the textures and effects she envisions.

"Any single piece can contain at least 15 to 20 different layers of paint, collaged items and mark making. My work has always been about my ability to manage my own fears and anxieties through abstraction and accumulation, to reach that other dimension where everything makes sense," explains Johnson.

When asked what she most wanted the readers of Artscope to know, Johnson said, "If there's anything I'd like people to know, I guess it's that I'd really like people to come to the show. Lori and I are both extremely proud of the work in this show. Times being what they are right now, it's so important for

people to come out and look at art and talk to artists. Art is one of the purest forms of communication that we can still rely on."

| Lisa Mikulski

## George Shaw *DISTANCE*



George Shaw, "Untitled", Mixed Media on Panel, 20"X24", 2018

**May 2-27, 2018**  
**Opening Reception: May 4, 6-8pm**  
**Artist's Talk and Closing: May 27, 3-5pm**

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