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Don't Miss: Sarah Cain

Before Sarah Cain ran away from her rural hometown in upstate New York at the age of 15 to study painting in Paris, she had an early run-in with the fashion world while working at the Dakota boutique in the nearby town of Chatham.



*Artist Sarah Cain*

"I used to call every day during my final class period and have my mom drive me over," recalls Cain, who sewed her own clothes as a teenager and attended Fashion Week events in New York City with the shop's owner. "As a 14-year-old, reading *Women's Wear Daily* was the highlight of my life. I'd just lock myself in the closet and page through it."

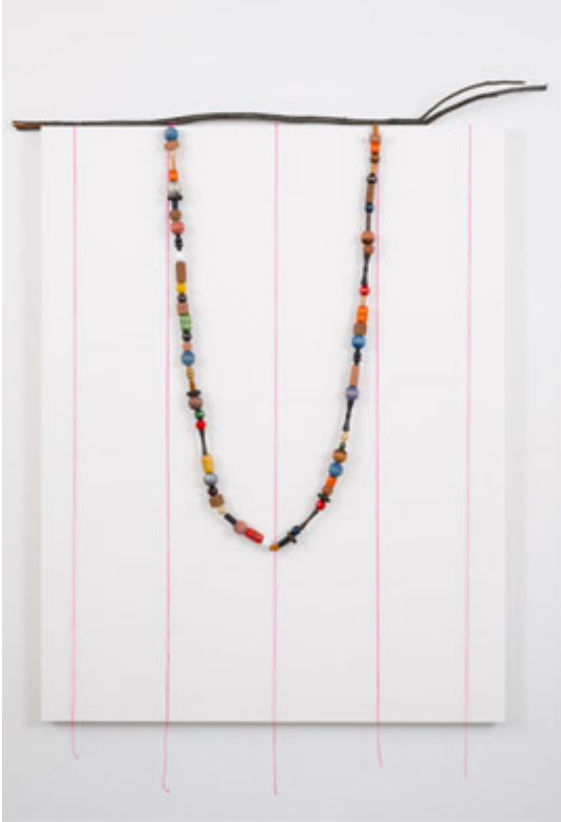
Two decades on, she seems to be channeling those early impressions into her neon-hued abstract paintings and installations, both of which incorporate everything from feathers and sand to gold chains and satin ribbons.



From left: *Mister*, 2012 Acrylic, canvas and sticks on canvas 89 x 74 x 7 inches; *Carnival Cruise*, 2012 Beads, thread, plastic bags, gouache, acrylic and silver leaf on canvas 62 x 48 x 7 inches

"There's always a back-and-forth awareness of fashion, but it's more about the body, and adorning the body," she says, before admitting that a recent outing with painters Rebecca Morris and Kim Fisher—who both confessed to their obsession with Mexican editions of fashion magazines—reminded Cain of her work's connection to the industry. "It's the first time I really thought about the relationship, but the way we paint is very tactile."

Though Cain has pushed against the boundaries of what painting can be from her days as a student at the San Francisco Art Institute and at Berkeley, she's just unveiled her most commercial show to date, *freedom is a prime number*, at [Honor Fraser Gallery](#) in Los Angeles. The new work is comprised of 14 large scale canvases with titles like "Mister" (a graffiti-meets-sticks-and-pink bows grid) or "Carnival Cruise," her favorite, which is focused around a \$300 bead display she bought and applied intact from a local craft store—the title is a riff off a line from Robert Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* and it takes her concept of "starting out with a mistake" to the extremes because, as she says, "fuck-ups are always more interesting."



From left: freedom is a prime number, 2012 Clay beads, wood beads, string and sticks on canvas 81 x 56 x 4 inches; Yoni Wolf, 2012 Cardboard, acrylic, stick and string on canvas 70 x 48 x 3 inches

The greatest example of this serendipitous synergy is Cain's gallery-consuming installation "so there, it's air," which juxtaposes the geometry of neon and pastel grids against Pollockesque drips and Schnabel-like washes and centers them around a 15-foot painted-palm frond that literally landed in her lap.

"I was taking an iced tea break, and this giant palm fell, and I was like, 'Oh, that's it.' A lot of the works are like that—just pulling in whatever comes to me during that time period," she says. "This body of work is a real proclamation for my love of painting, but also my desire to challenge what painting is, which goes back to the title, and having the freedom to do whatever you want because it's important."

Through October 13 at Honor Fraser, 2622 S. La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles [honorfraser.com](http://honorfraser.com)

Photos courtesy of the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery  
By [Michael Slenske](#)  
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