



TORN APART

For a Chicago artist, the painted canvas becomes an active tool of manipulation and abstraction.

WRITTEN BY MIKKI BRAMMER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK ISHMAN



Anyone who happens to be in the vicinity of artist Jean Alexander Frater's Roscoe

Village studio space will likely hear an unusual, repetitive sound. It's her ripping up a painted canvas, over and over again. "I have to tell my studio mates when to wear earphones because it's really loud," she laughs.

It may sound like Alexander Frater is destroying art, but this is just the beginning of her process. To create her tactile abstract works, Alexander Frater staples a canvas to the wall and paints it in latex, acrylic or varnish so that it takes on a leather- or vinyl-like appearance. Then the destruction begins. She "disrupts" the canvas, tearing it into strips and weaving it on to a stretcher. At times she uses a taut weave; other times she folds and ripples the pieces. "Instead of starting with a pre-made shape, the already-painted canvas determines what that shape is going to be," she says.

The aim is what Alexander Frater calls an "experimental physical curiosity," pushing the structural limits of painting by considering the pigment, canvas and bars as individual materials and exploring how they work together. She loves the idea that her work juxtaposes the violent process of tearing with the more traditional and gentle process of weaving. "I like to use these two paradoxical concepts to kind of create a conversation or a problem," she says.

Using mostly tertiary hues, Alexander Frater admits that her color choices are often influenced by simpler things, such as the weather or her mood. But sometimes—like in her 2017 show, "Softer"—they're loaded with symbolism. "I wanted to think about what were typically feminine colors," she says. "And what that meant and how that situated itself within the history of art."

Above all, the artist hopes that the happiness she feels when working with material and color translates to the viewer's experience. "A lot of it has to do with just bringing joy," she says. "Color is so evocative of all kinds of things." ■



Artist Jean Alexander Frater, who works out of her studio space in Roscoe Village, uses fragments of torn, painted canvas (left) to create her colorful pieces, such as *Palm Horizon* (below), *Young Adult Fiction* and *Solar Juice* (both shown bottom) and *Harnessed Saturation* (opposite).

