

# THESE ARE TERMS THAT INFORM MY WORK AS AN ARTIST

EXTRAVAGANCE.  
LARGESSE.  
SUPERFLUITY.  
CRAZY-BEAUTIFUL.  
HYPER-BEAUTIFUL.  
PSYCHEDELIC.

Extravagance is a term I use for a constellation of concerns—including radical generosity, largesse, superfluity, flesh, materiality, painting, abundance, richness, wandering, and wild being—that is of central theoretical interest for me. These concerns continue to grow and expand, fed by many sources, among the most fundamental being phenomenology, which I have been engaged with since the mid-1990s; and painterly painters—especially the Italians, Flemish, and Spaniards of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as the sometimes-ridiculed Baroque and Rococo painters of the 18th century, especially Fragonard and Boucher. A stunning 1994 essay on largesse by Jean Starobinski, an expert in 18th-century European culture, further fired my interest in this topic. George Bataille's *The Accursed Share*—with his discussion of the restricted economy based on scarcity and the general economy based on superabundance—is also an influence. These ideas are important to me because poverty and austerity are matters of life and death—not simply for the basic survival of human beings but for our thriving. Extravagance is both a way to lave the wounds caused by a solely or primarily utilitarian approach to life and an entirely other realm of being.

Digging into the roots of words such as “superfluous” (*super* over + *fluere* to flow) and “extravagant” (*extra* outside + *vagari* wandering) expanded my theoretical interest and gave me my personal vocabulary. (In fact, a general attitude toward my much-loved Rococo that deems it frivolous and superfluous led me to dig into the word “superfluous” and fall in love with it.)

The terms “crazy beautiful” or “hyper-beautiful,” are used with respect to color, and I attempt to push the beauty so hard that it becomes strange or absurd, or even approaches ugliness. I am especially interested in color that is beautiful but also sets your teeth on edge – “sweet-tart,” and “sick” color that teeters between pleasing and repulsive and beautiful and ugly.

The term “psychedelic” (*psyche* mind + *deloun* make visible, reveal) is used, not in relation to a drug experience, but again,

closer to its root meaning of making the world visible to the mind. With respect to composition, I am interested in the play of coherence and dissolution—in a composition that feels like it is barely holding itself together and could fly apart or slide off the support at any time. Use of the edge—ignoring, meeting, falling short of, or exceeding it—further destabilizes the composition.

Taking the phenomenological attitude, my incarnated consciousness and the materials and space are all together. There is a performative/process aspect to pouring the painting—the process is all performed by me physically as an agent acting in space and time, using materials, and the result is a painting.

Being awake and alive and incorporating a degree of accident in pouring the paint is a way to immerse myself in intermundane space and the intertwining or tangling of vision, body, and world. “Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world since the world is flesh?” asks Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* in the chapter “The Intertwining-The Chiasm.” Being awake and alive is the state toward which I urge myself in the face of thousands of distractions and invitations to narcotizing fantasy that characterize our super-mediated world.

The most important thing for me with respect to the relationship between painting and ideas is that *the act of painting is an act of philosophy in itself* and painting can explicate theory. (I first wrote about this with respect to art as an act of theology in an unpublished 1993 paper. Julia Barclay-Morton has also discussed this idea with respect to theater.) The act of painting, the act of writing, the act of being in conversation with other artists and writers, and all the many acts of living are all part of a total project of extravagance.

Leah Durner, New York

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This is a condensed version of Leah Durner's presentation given at the College Art Association 105th Annual Conference in New York on 15 February 2017.

## EXTRAVAGANT PAINTING OUTPOURING AND OVERFLOWING LEAH DURNER

Leah Durner's painting occupies the critical space between modernism and postmodernism—between postwar abstraction and post-Duchampian conceptualism and post-Warholian pop. Her output includes works in oil, acrylic, and gouache on canvas and on paper as well as works in poured enamel.

Durner has had solo exhibitions of her work at Loretta Howard Gallery (2012), 571 Projects (2011), Nye Basham Studio (2009), Wooster Arts Space (2006, her New York solo debut), Berry College (2005), and Limbo (1999). Durner's work has been included in group exhibitions at Heather Gaudio Fine Art (2016), Winston Wachter Fine Art (2011), The Convent (2009), Art Gotham (2005), Cazenovia College (2005) with Julie Evans and others, Barbara Ann Levy Gallery (2000), Markham Murray Gallery (1999), Steinbaum Kraus Gallery (1997), CBs 313 Gallery (1992), Coup de Grace Gallery (1991 and 1989) with Karen Finley, Barbara Kruger, Nancy Spero, Jenny Holzer, Kay Rosen and others, SoHo Center for Visual Arts with Glenn Ligon and others (1991), Wake Forest University (1994 and 1990), and City Without Walls (1986, 1987, and 1988). Durner was an artist-in-residence at the Leighton Studios, Banff Centre for the Arts (2001) and a visiting artist at The American Academy in Rome (2016).

Durner has curated exhibitions, published art theory, and lectured and written on a number of topics, including the American landscape; gestural abstraction and phenomenology; conceptualism and its sources; Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and art, money, and gender; artist Dan Graham; and composers Maryanne Amacher and John Cage. Critics and scholars who have written on her work include David Cohen (critic and publisher of *artcritical.com*); John Yau (poet and critic); Jorella Andrews; and Michael Sanders (philosopher). Durner earned her M.F.A. at Rutgers University, where she studied art theory with Martha Rosler, performance with Geoff Hendricks, and painting with Leon Golub.

An intensive conversation between Jorella Andrews and Durner on her oeuvre and its relation to practices and histories of paint-

ing will appear in Dr. Andrews's book, *Merleau-Ponty and the Questions of Painting*, to be published by Bloomsbury Press.

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This broadsheet is a component of Leah Durner's presentation as co-chair and panelist.

### CONFERENCE

College Art Association 105th Annual Conference  
New York, NY 15 – 18 February 2017  
New York Hilton Midtown 1335 Sixth Avenue, New York, NY 10019

### PANEL

*Immeasurable Extravagance: Proposals for an Economy of Abundance in an Age of Scarcity*

Wednesday 15 February 2017 8:30 – 10:00 AM  
Sutton Parlor Center, 2nd Floor

Chairs: Jorella Andrews, Goldsmiths, University of London;  
Leah Durner, Independent Visual Artist

### PANELISTS

*Session Introduction: Reclaiming Extravagance for a Time Such as This*  
Jorella Andrews, Goldsmiths, University of London

*The Festive High Altar in Spain (1760–80) and the Enlightenment Polemic over Folk Indulgence*  
Tomas Macsotay, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

*The Lights Are Much Brighter There: Performance in Downtown New York (1978–88) as an Economy of Abundance*  
Meredith Mowder, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

*Extravagant Painting: Outpouring and Overflowing*  
Leah Durner, Independent Visual Artist

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Cover: *silverbioletgreyblacksienna pour* 2016 poured latex enamel on canvas 48 x 36 in 121.92 x 91.44 cm  
Poster: *redorangegreenpink pour* 2011 poured latex enamel on canvas 60 x 48 in 152.4 x 121.92 cm



