

CULTURED

Off The Wall
By Janelle Zara
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"I don't plan, and I don't draw," says Los Angeles-based artist Sarah Cain, an abstract painter whose in-situ works are often completed as quickly as they are conceived. Over coffee on the patio of an Echo Park cafe, she explains the process of creating "The Imaginary Architecture of Love," an upcoming solo exhibition that takes over the Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) of Raleigh in North Carolina starting October 12. "I arrive at the space. I take pictures. I think about the space, and I tell them what materials to get." In this case, these include a few gallons of house paint, in addition to four couches that will be selected via email correspondence. From there, her loosely laid vision takes on the lobby, and then enjoys free reign of 4,000 square feet of museum space. Vibrant shades of house paint will cover the walls and wrap around corners, covering the arches of the windows and height of its columns. The paint will spill over the couches like a sheet before descending to the floor.



As is typical of her practice, Cain will embed objects found in situ and layer paintings made on traditional stretched canvases within the work. The particular formal qualities of the composition, however, she won't decide until she arrives on site again for an intensive 10-day period of around-the clock painting. It's a method of improvisation and architectural negotiation that she developed early on in her career—part of which includes several failed attempts at life in New York.

"I officially had an apartment once, but I could never find a job," Cain recalls. "I would do works in abandoned buildings, which were usually attached to a boyfriend or somebody I knew who had keys. It was stupid, but it was essential, and it's the foundation of what I do now."

Consequently, Cain's work is always of the present tense, diligently executed to manifest her mindset at a particular point in time. The bold gestures of her paintings possess a wild autonomy. The broad strokes, squiggles and swooshes refute the designated borders of the canvas to invade the far-reaches of their environment, undaunted by large expanses, no matter the size. On the corner of a gritty Hollywood intersection still host to drug deals and prostitution, Cain covered the public art organization LAND's (Los Angeles Nomadic Division) headquarters with a neon-hued, graffiti-like composition that extends beyond its

walls to include its guard rails and security bars. She finished the piece in three days, painting continuously for as long as there was light.

As they expand in space, Cain's paintings dually expand the notion of how painting is defined, as they incorporate methods and materials that encroach on sculpture. "She is devoted to the poetic power of painting, and to exploring the limits of the materials," says Corrina Peipon, artist and museum liaison for Honor Fraser, the L.A. gallery where Cain's most recent show featured furniture, sea shells and dollar bills hung from monofilament, in addition to her on-site paintings. "Sarah's unwavering conviction, along with the formal innovation and striking beauty of her work are what initially attracted the gallery's attention."