



# THE FRENCH-AMERICAN AFFAIR

The Los Angeles based artist who's taking the  
art world by storm

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Interview location: Hotel Les Damesdu Pantheon, 5th Arr Paris.

If footage of the Chateau Marmont on old film, coloured in lush tones were just pieces to a Lana Del Ray music video to you and me, for Laurel Holloman it developed into an affair she has with her paintings. It was interesting to learn how it all came about for this American artist. In my novice understanding of contemporary arts, any show in Paris is a definite must-see. But when it's the first solo show she landed, Laurel Holloman took my appreciation of the arts to a whole new level.

The first I had heard of her work was from following her on twitter. Every now and again, my attention would be quickly lulled into gazing at shots of paintings, like small glimpses into a movie teaser. I found myself watching a genius at work. It was so easy to want to feel associated with and there was an immediate sense of something big headed Laurel's way.

So, when I found out about her 'Coeur Libre' exhibition, I knew I had to absolutely try for an interview. And I did. And almost immediately she said yes. So, as planned I sat down with Laurel for a nice little chat. It was a Thursday morning and as her cab pulled up in front of the Place du Pantheon where the exhibition gallery is, she quickly headed over to the entrance where I was eagerly waiting to greet.

"Hello, Ms. Holloman," I said.

Slightly startled she reached out her hand to shake mine. And then I introduced myself.

"Oh, nice to meet you too," she then responded now knowing who this stranger was; sat against the wall with notes and a camera tripod sticking out from her backpack.

We then made our way to a hotel lobby just across the street to do the interview. Inside, whilst having ordered her morning cuppa, I was still frantically rummaging through my bag looking for my voice recorder (just so you know, elephants get lost in my bag). I apologised for my tardiness and Laurel smiled. Always a good way to make a first impression!

But whatever impression I did make, it didn't matter. It was all about this truly talented artist in her early forties who has a collection of eighteen stunning paintings hung up on the gallery walls to showcase to the world. I knew from my research that she had to an extent, studied painting and sculpting in college. But what I didn't know was that that had little to do with the artist she has become.

"I wouldn't say that I had formal art training in any way. With the paintings I'm doing now, it's more self-taught," Laurel explained to me.

"My undergraduate education was probably focused more on theatre than anything."

Laurel's long devotion to the arts stems far back to her college days. That's probably why she majored in arts for her undergraduate. She started out at the University of Chapel Hill in North Carolina, did a semester at UCLA and finished at a theatre school in London, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in art and theatre. Her studies in performance arts had even led her to do a number of stage plays in Chicago and New York.

In London, where she studied at the British American Drama Academy, she cites the many art museums she visited.

"I was visiting museums in between the classes and plays. I got the chance to go to Paris too which was just around the time that film about Camille Claudel came out."

Camille Claudel was a French Sculptor famed for her legendary works as well as her long relationship with French sculptor, Auguste Rodin. This was heavily depicted in the movie and had made quite an impact on Laurel.

"I was obsessed with that movie. I saw it like ten times. I think I've always been intrigued about the mind of an artist."



Laurel in front of her show title painting 'Coeur Libre'.



Visitors Admiring 'Red Rain'.

Laurel's own work had in turn intrigued someone else. One of her paintings she did for the Tribeca series a couple of years ago, 'Bullet', was picked up by a French winemaker. The wine name, 'L'interpretation' has the painting printed out on their Merlot bottles and is quite literally a match as good as the beverage is with poultry.

"Isabelle Van Rollegheem, a French buyer who had bought 'She burns my eyes' contacted me and said she was interested in a painting for a wine label. And 'Bullet' was tested out for this bottle and it worked out really well.

"I wasn't really interested in the commercial part of it but I just really liked working with her and was interested in what she was doing. I also like the wine and felt it was a nice fit."

Paintings for the Tribeca series which were one of the first Laurel sold, sold out within two months which had included 'Bullet' and 'Swan dive'. Laurel recalls a buyer who was initially interested in one painting but ended up shipping home both of them.

"She had asked to come to the loft and when she got there, her jaw just dropped."

It was also at this time that Laurel found herself immersed in her art, sequestering herself in the loft whilst making some big decisions about making painting her full time job. She had turned down some acting work and was thrilled with the series for it was a new thing for her.

When I asked if she was an emotional person, I received a straight, simple answer.

"I'm all emotions," she said carving a rather stern smile.

My question was of course in reference to how she describes her art as residing in an emotional state. It had expanded from her background in acting for which she added she had "manipulated her emotional state for almost twenty years."

"It's always very tricky to express yourself emotionally through this but it seems like its working because I get a lot of response where people feel a connection. But at the same

time I don't paint for people's connections. I have to paint for myself."

Emotional or not, Laurel admits to painting to music. Apart from being obsessed by Lana Del Ray, Damien Rice is another key musician to her art. She's also influenced by the likes of Justin Vernon from Bon Iver who also used to live in Raleigh, North Carolina where Laurel is from. It made me think her painting, 'The part of me apart from you', had come from one of his numbers- Holocene. I was close, but not quite.

"Yeah, I'm a huge fan of his but it really has more to do with other things.

"It's like when you discover something about yourself separate from someone else. Or a part of you that no one else will ever know," Laurel described.

The show was offered to Laurel about a year ago where at that point she wasn't sure when the actual date was going to be.

"I was working with a tight time frame and I paint in oil. Oils take nearly six months to dry. When I did come to know the date, it was really quick. So, I tried a lot of things like using different kinds of solvents that take only a day to dry to turning the heat up in my studio every night.

"I was just trying to dry these suckers and get a good protection on them. And it was terrifying at times but it's taught me how to focus."

Her biggest challenge was to let her style come out and evolve to a singular theme. She told me she hates exhibitions where every single painting is similar to the other. So, still keeping to her style, she also wanted to have some pieces that weren't like the others.

I eventually saw what she had meant when I stepped into the gallery- this time to look at the actual canvasses.



Seen here are 'It's You, It's All for You (L)' & 'The Part of Me Apart From You' (R)

When she told me there's a duality in everything she did, that there's a painting on top of the first, I understood how pertinent layering colours are in transforming your art into a masterpiece.

"If you want to have any freedom and dual effect you have to layer the colours. You have to under paint and need to know where you're headed with it. But halfway through, the painting starts to dictate where it's going."

One of the paintings, 'Memory loss', is a whole play on that where the top layer is likened to a blurred image on film. Her work on it was very inspired by Gerard Richter in the way that he used to do photo based paintings, making abstracts from an image pulled from film and blurred.

'Coeur Libre' which is French for 'My heart is free' is also the name of one of the paintings on show. The virtual movement, almost 3D-like effect the white figure on a black canvas has of what seems to be a stallion or unicorn is impeccable. Laurel however, feels she shares a love-hate relationship with it, referring to a 'home depot paint thinner purchase' that was a milky white to create a spray effect but was later painted over as it evaporated too quickly.

For her, I imagine her favourite must be 'Red Rain'.

"I think 'Red Rain' is really close to where I'd like to head. It's technically a much more complicated painting and I just remember it was like cracking a prime number when I accomplished what I wanted in that painting.

"So you'll probably see something similar in style to that one in the future but on a larger scale."

Laurel Holloman is an artist who paints big. All her paintings are at least 40x60 inches. And yet, she plans to paint even bigger. She is ambitious but is still allowing herself to grow as an artist. I suggested that we might even see her in the Tate one day but her reply was modest.

"One can only hope and dream of doing that."

But I remain adamant. I am more than hoping to. It would be a huge shame if this were her last show I would ever see. Maybe when she's in her own private moment, rubbing and mixing solvents for her next piece, she'll have another reason to come back to Paris. Or perhaps when she remembers this conversation, she'll think of Cardiff and our growing art scene. There are plans too, I've heard, to do another show in Italy later this summer. But I was only told to keep looking for details. Fair enough. I think I know a talent when I see one and Paris will certainly not be the final stop for Laurel Holloman.

This exhibition took place from 4-21 April, 2012 at the Galerie du Pantheon in the 5th arrondissement of Paris, France. For more details of the paintings please visit [laurelholloman.studio.net](http://laurelholloman.studio.net) or follow the artist on Twitter, @LaurelHolloman and Instagram, @laurelholloman.