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## Jenny Morgan's Work is an 'Act of Love'

By Ben Thompson



Jenny Morgan, *Fundamentals*, 2015, oil on canvas, 34 x 28 inches.

Jenny Morgan continues to make ripples in the art world since her work appeared in *Get Real: New American Painting* at MOCA Jacksonville. The Museum acquired her self-portrait *Brand New* from that exhibition, and it continues to be a visitor favorite in the Permanent Collection.

As MOCA celebrates six Abstract Expressionist painters in *Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction*, we thought it was a great time to revisit the career of this realist painter. In preparation for Coffee Talk with a Curator: Woman of Realism on June 18, I asked Morgan a few questions by email.

Morgan grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah. She earned her undergraduate degree in illustration from Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in Denver, Colorado, and in 2008, she completed her master's degree in painting from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. For the last ten years, she has been living and working in Brooklyn. "I see myself staying in the city indefinitely," she told MOCA.



Jenny Morgan, *Purple Haze*, 2015,  
oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches.



Jenny Morgan, *Helpful Spectre*, 2016,  
oil on canvas, 34 x 29 inches.

**What have you been working on since your work appeared in *Get Real*?**

Since the exhibition with MOCA, I have had three solo exhibitions in New York, Denver, and London, which have been working with ideas around death, rebirth, and transformation.

**How did the MOCA Jacksonville exhibition affect your career?**

The exhibition was one of my first major museum shows and helped to define a new level in my career. I was very excited to be among other painters who I could relate with and learn from. I also enjoyed being included in the panel discussion Women Painting Women; being able to share in that dialogue with the other women and audience was very rewarding.

**How would you describe your work to someone who's never seen it?**

I describe my work as psychological portraiture dealing with improvisational realism. I paint portraits of people who I love and admire in a primarily realistic way, allowing for abstraction and destruction of the form. The portraits are mostly straightforward and hold eye contact with the viewer. My intent is for the audience to feel as if they are meeting someone in the flesh.

**What ideas do you explore in your work?**

I explore a broad range of the human experience; every subject brings in his or her own unique material and adds a new dimension to the work. Some of the prominent ideas are vulnerability, death, rebirth, motherhood, the psychedelic experience, sexuality, and intimacy.

**What do you want people to know about your work?**

I want to express that the work is an act of love. The more I mature within my practice, the more I understand the transformative power in art-making, not only for my personal well-being, but for those who I invite into my process. I think that at times art-making can feel like such an isolating activity, but it's as primal and as necessary for the health of the human being as any other calling or vocation.



Jenny Morgan's *Turning the Tide* exhibition appears at Beers London. Image courtesy of Beers London.



Jenny Morgan, *In the Moment (Death Hymn)*, 2015,  
oil on canvas, 56 x 38 inches.



Jenny Morgan, *The Tempest*, 2015,  
oil on canvas.

### Where do you find inspiration?

My primary source of inspiration is within my personal relationships. The work relies heavily on my connections with those around me. Life events and transitional moments are very alluring, and paintings through these experiences help me to understand life on a deeper level. I am also influenced by the work of fellow artists and will pull ideas and techniques from those who I admire.

### What's your workspace like? When and where do you like to create your art?

My studio is located in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The studio has hardwood floors, a wall of windows with an abundance of plants and mirrors. I see my studio as a second home where I spend the majority of my waking hours, so I set up the space with the intent of being as comfortable as possible and surround myself with things that make me feel good. I enjoy having space separate from my home so that I am able to detach at some point and let the work breathe.

### How do you prepare for a new project?

I find that after each show or major body of work I take a few months off in order to clean the mental slate. During this time away from the studio, I try to ground myself in real life as much as possible and make time to exercise and be with family and friends. I also spend a lot of time

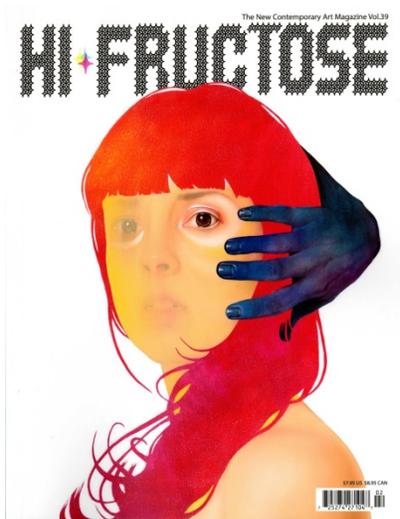
looking at art, absorbing new ideas. After creating that space, the fresh ideas and concepts start to gradually flow in and build into a new theme and thesis.

**Tell us something surprising about your creative process or your working style.**

Lately, the work has been speaking to me through my dreams. If I have questions or I am concerned about a painting, I will have a dream where the painting speaks to me and tells me what it wants or how it needs to be altered. At times, the dreams catch me off guard and remind me just how deep the art-making process is; as artists, we pull from these invisible unconscious levels and bring forth beings into psychical life. Like magic.

**What is your next project?**

In the fall, I will have an exhibition in Colorado that is centered on my self-portraiture. The show will include of over fifteen self-portraits I've made over the past eight years. I will also paint a new portrait to accompany the show. I am imagining that I will feel a bit over-whelmed being face to face with the multitude of selves I've worked with over the past decade, but I am grateful that they will be collected and show as a whole.



Jenny Morgan's *Shadow Play* appears on the cover of April's *Hi-Fructose* Vol. 39.



Jenny Morgan, *Dark Star*, 2015, oil on canvas, 70 x 48 inches.



Jenny Morgan, *You Only Live Once*, 2015, oil on canvas, 82 x 58 inches.