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Rachel Eulena Williams: from painting to sculpture Rachel Eulena Williams: from painting to sculpture



Portrait of Rachel Eulena Williams in her studio in Brooklyn, New York, 2019 Photo by Nicholas Calcott.

The rising star's colorful art melds mediums as it explores modern femininity. In Rachel Eulena Williams's Brooklyn studio, an airy concrete box with floor-to-ceiling views of the New York skyline, the artist's tools – hammers, awls, drill bits – sit in blue bins with neatly handwritten labels. Ropes overflow from the containers on some low shelves. These crafty elements come together in the artist's exuberantly colored, wall-mounted assemblages, stapled, glued, or tied within large wooden frames. Each composition features different weights of fraying, coiled, or paint-soaked rope that provide a physical framework onto which the artist attaches canvas cut-outs. The ropes also make sculptural gestures akin to brushstrokes or drawn lines.

Popping in a full spectrum of saturated hues, Williams's collages deconstruct the elements of painting and reassemble them as sculpture or, conversely, compress sculpture into the

dimensions of a painting. During the early days of working in her tiny Brooklyn apartment, the Miami native and 2013 Cooper Union graduate developed her hybrid approach partly out of necessity: 'I didn't have the space to make sculptures,' she recalls. She is not a painter by training, but was 'interested in the actual materiality of the canvas.' Inspired by the fabric-based works of Al Loving and Howardena Pindell, as well as painter Alma Thomas's mosaic-like compositions, she began cutting down paintings to use almost as tiles. There, she says, she found 'the ability to arrange color as if it were a tactile object.'



Left: *Swing in Protective Style*, 2022. Right: *Understanding Absorption*, 2023 (detail). Both works by Rachel Eulena Williams. Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute/ Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow.

At Dundee Contemporary Arts, the artist's upcoming solo exhibition, 'Hair and Body', features a new suite of collages where cut-outs arranged in floral patterns serve as references to femininity. The artist wanted to address standards of feminine beauty without shifting into abstraction. 'Hair and body are two things that we, as women, get judged on,' she says. *Swing in Protective Style* (2022) transforms her usual materials into a playful and interactive format: a seat suspended from braided ropes that viewers are invited to swing from. Both the title and the work itself allude to the care and process of maintaining Black hair. The act of braiding provided Williams with a meditative exercise to perform in the studio. Tactility is essential, she says. 'I'm inspired by working with my hands.' With touch-tempting works like these, that inspiration is contagious.