

VISUAL ARTS

# On the inside looking out

Painter wrestles with the demons of isolation and loss

**O**ver the last few years, Los Angeles-based painter Kirsten Macy has battled illness, a car accident, the pandemic and the fires engulfing California, the latter of which rained ash around her studio.

Macy has dedicated much of her life to the East West Wilderness Project, which takes artists on nature retreats, providing an engaging space for creativity and exploration. While she was already grappling with difficult emotions from her personal experiences, the pandemic and natural disaster removed her ability to socially engage with other artists in her favorite outdoor settings.

Macy's most recent exhibition, "Always a Little Sad," currently on view at Barry Whistler Gallery, is the result of her wrestling — like all of us — with an unexpected bout of isolation and sense of loss during quarantine. Although she started making the work before the various catastrophes of 2020, the emotional intensity of the paintings grew as the year progressed.

"Existing in nature is such a wonderful exercise in looking, thinking and feeling. It places you in both the role of the audience and the subject all at the same time," she says. "The contrast of being alone at home and watching the news is strange. It's bizarre to be physically disconnected and yet worried for everyone at the same time."

The exhibition includes five rectangular and two tondo (round) paintings. The oil-enamel works are expansive in vision yet intimate in scale, featuring brilliant strokes of white, yellow, pink, blue and purple floating atop glossy black backgrounds. Macy's shapes and lines are inspired by a mix of contemporary sources — telescopic views, landscapes, skylines and reflections from electronic screens — layered with romantic and otherworldly imagery of halos, auras and orbs.

The paintings are haunting and melancholy, ruminations on the vastness of the universe and the desire for connectivity. They combine the sensibility of peering out into the world with the feeling of being removed from participation, as though looking through a pane of glass and seeing your own solitary reflection at the same time.

The works in "Always a Little Sad" remind me of the title and thesis of a 1978 book about photography, *Mirrors and Windows*, in which the late curator John Szarkowski discusses the idea that it is the role of artists to either reflect the times or provide new ways of looking at the world. In Macy's case, she is — literally and metaphorically — doing both.

She's finding new ways to make work about the outside while trapped in her home, watching events unfold from behind closed windows and locked doors while experiencing a collective grief and concern for the future.

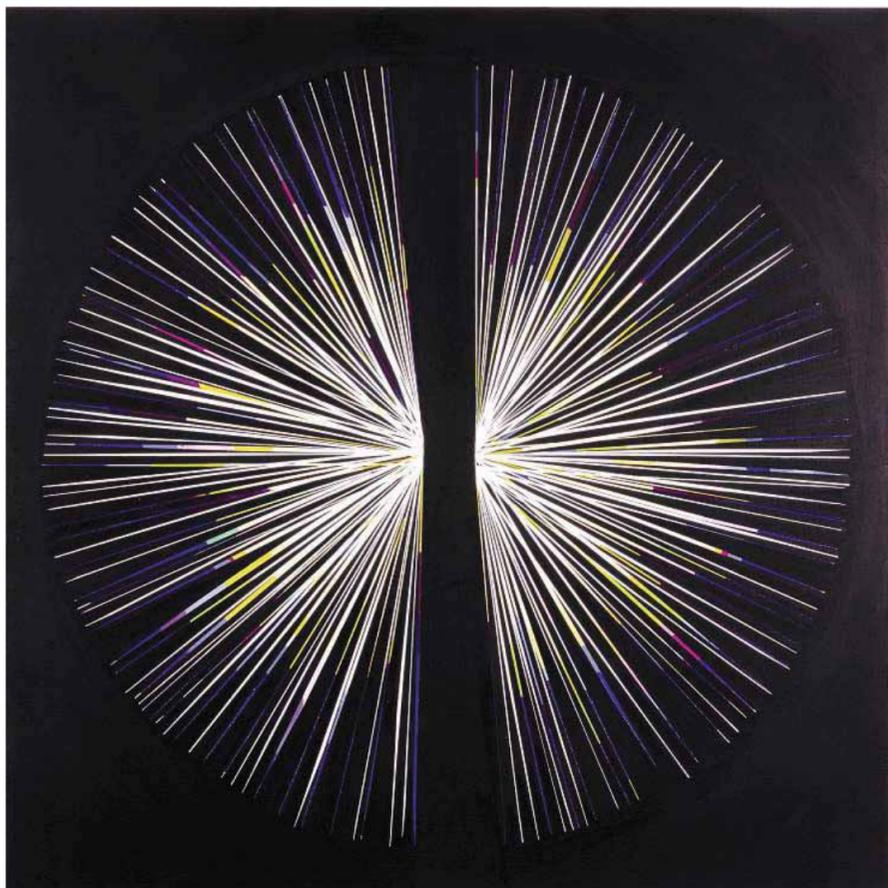


**DANIELLE AVRAM**

artslife@dallasnews.com

**Details**

"Kirsten Macy: Always a Little Sad" runs through Saturday at Barry Whistler Gallery, 315 Cole St., Dallas. 214-939-0242. By appointment. barrywhistlergallery.com.



Photos: Kevin Todora

Kirsten Macy's exhibition includes five rectangular and two tondo paintings, including *Outrun the Avalanche* (above) and *Alight II* (top), both enamel on canvas.



**KIRSTEN MACY**

Danielle Avram is a Dallas-based arts writer and curator.

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