

JUXTAPOZ

A Wavy Place: Gabrielle Garland Gives a New Perspective

By Tara Anne Dalbow | 8 May 2024

“The house, even more than the landscape, is a “psychic state,” even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy,” wrote Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*. When I recall the quote to painter Gabrielle Garland, she’s quick to tell me that she, like Bachelard, is “definitely a phenomenologist. That’s me!” To view her luminous oil paint portraits of technicolor houses is to understand precisely what Bachelard meant by the “psychic state” of a home. Though many of the buildings feature ubiquitous American gabled roofs and prototypical facades, under Garland’s gaze, the houses are rendered anew, distinctive, and alive with the aspirations of the people just inside. “When the image is new, the world is new,” wrote Bachelard.

Garland first learned to *make* it new from her mother, who ran a decorative painting firm that specialized in the restoration of historical buildings. For years, she watched her mother assiduously peel layer after layer of paint to reveal the original work, however impartial, beneath. The subjects of Garland’s painting undergo similar denudations, exposing, beneath the conventional architecture and customary materials, exhilarating color combinations, fanciful accents, illusory light fixtures, and myriad other manifestations of the inhabitant’s vision. “I just love all the ways people claim and define their domestic space. Whether we realize it consciously or not, it’s such a huge part of our lives; we all work so hard to make our homes,” explains Garland.

“Humans have always had the need and drive to make a home for themselves, whatever the setting and circumstances. My work addresses only a small slice of this vast context, so I know I can never exhaust my subject matter. The challenge of defining territory and making oneself a home is a timeless one,” adds the artists.

Through masterful distortions of perspective and extravagant exaggerations of color, Garland accentuates the idiosyncrasies that first attracted her eye and evoked the eye of the designer. While she sometimes paints from found imagery, more often than not, Garland works from her own photographs, frequently taken on walks around her neighborhood in New York City, during visits to Los Angeles, or while running errands in New Jersey, where she’ll pull to the side of the road, familiarize herself with the layout of the house, and



Untitled (GG0020), 2023, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

then take as many photos as she can without rousing too much suspicion. “It’s usually light and shade or a really joyful color combination,” she said of the aspects of a house that most often inspire her to stop the car.

In certain paintings, Garland draws the viewer’s attention to an enduring feature by representing it in uncanny detail, as with *Untitled (GG0021)*, wherein a light fixture takes on an illusory, lucent quality thanks to the careful rendering of the hardware’s iridescent finish, the glimmer of dappled light in the glass lantern, and the shifting shadow of an out of frame tree branch cast across the siding. Elsewhere, she distorts the perspective, shrinking one side of the building’s frame to enlarge another, as with *Untitled (GG0019)*, where the front door all but disappears. In others, she uses super-saturated hues—a color palette she inherited from her father, who, like her mother, was also an artist—to attend to aesthetically appealing color combinations, as with *Untitled (GG0023)*, where the fluorescent orange trim recalls the house’s brick visage, and *Untitled (GG0022)*, where aquamarine siding matches the flower box, the overhang, and the front and back steps.



Untitled (GG0024), 2023, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

While her parents may have influenced her interest in architecture and penchant for chromatics, it’s abundantly clear that Garland has developed an entirely novel way of seeing and attending to the world that’s as rarefied as it is generous. Still, more remarkable than the ability to see beneath the mundane surface to the heart of things is her capacity to render it visible to others so we, too, can see our neighborhoods, homes, and maybe even ourselves anew.