

***I DWELL IN POSSIBILITY***

**FIONA DEBELL and JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER**

September 19 - October 25, 2024

**Virtual Exhibition Opening**

Thursday, September 19, 2024 | 10:00 AM



Lola Shepard is pleased to present *I DWELL IN POSSIBILITY*, a virtual two-person exhibition featuring abstract paintings by **FIONA DEBELL** and **JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER**. This online exhibition will debut on the gallery's website on **Thursday, September 19, 2024, at 10:00 AM** and run through October 25, 2024.

Inspired by Emily Dickinson's eponymous poem celebrating the joyful liberation of creative expression, *I DWELL IN POSSIBILITY* showcases the work of Fiona Debell and Jean Alexander Frater—two artists who push the limits of art by making shape the central subject of their work, accentuated by their daring use of color. Fiona Debell's *Reciprocity* series employs organic forms and vivid color fields to explore the intricacies of human interaction and non-verbal communication. Jean Alexander Frater, on the other hand, takes a philosophical approach by deconstructing and reconstructing the canvas to challenge and redefine traditional modes of artmaking. Together, these artists demonstrate a spirit of innovation and experimentation, advancing the frontiers of art while embracing an unrestricted pursuit of new possibilities.

**FIONA DEBELL**, a self-taught British abstract artist living and working in Toronto, Canada, is recognized for her emotionally moving, color-saturated minimalist works that explore the complexities of human relationships. Her artistic journey began at 18 when a powerful encounter with Mark Rothko's paintings at the Tate Modern ignited her passion for abstract expressionism. This

pivotal experience led her to pursue art full-time, and since emigrating from the UK to Canada in 2014, her work has continued to evolve, reflecting the diverse spectrum of human experiences and connections.

Featuring Debell's latest collection, *Reciprocity*, the series emphasizes the importance of mutual relationships in human interactions. Through minimalist compositions and a focus on the juxtaposition of opposing high-key colors, she distills these relationships into their most basic forms, encouraging viewers to contemplate the give-and-take inherent in their connections. The series is inspired by the Hard-Edge movement of the 1960s, where bold shapes and pure forms are used to explore complex emotional themes. Her post-painterly techniques render her work both visually compelling and conceptually rich, inviting viewers into a meditative experience.

Debell is dedicated to both technical precision and thematic depth in her work. Her signature style—marked by clean lines, vibrant colors, and a super-flat, velvet-like finish that conceals brushstrokes—ensures each piece provides a rich visual and emotional experience. Designed to be viewed and hung from multiple orientations, her paintings invite engagement from various perspectives, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the dynamic, intuitive narratives she crafts in each composition.

**JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER**, a Chicago-based artist, challenges the conventions of painting by merging traditional materials with innovative techniques. She uses the classic tools of a painter—a brush, paint, and canvas—but employs them in unorthodox ways, blurring the line between painting and sculpture. By integrating methodologies from fiber arts, ceramics, and sculpture, Frater expands the language of painting, creating what she describes as “sculptural painting.” Her work reimagines the process of painting by manipulating the canvas, allowing new forms to emerge that extend beyond the customary constraints of the medium.

Frater’s artistic vision is deeply influenced by her personal history. As a child, she was struck by a car and spent nearly a year immobilized in body casts. This period of physical restriction profoundly impacted her work, as she continuously explores themes of the body, movement, and limitation—both literal and metaphorical. Her paintings evoke questions about their own nature: What are they? What was destroyed, deconstructed, and then rebuilt? What remains of the original painting, and what kind of object has it become? Drawing from her experiences, Frater’s art confronts the rigid norms, encouraging a deeper and more engaged interaction with her work.

Frater sees her abstract, tactile creations as existing in an “in-between” state, where the composition is both knowable and unknowable. Her process begins with meticulous planning, where she carefully considers form, scale, and color choices, including underpainted hues. She paints directly onto unstretched, raw canvas with acrylic and latex viewing the large fields of vibrant color as “bodies.” Frater then tears her canvases into strips, giving them a three-dimensional appearance and texture. She reassembles the pieces through weaving, folding, and sculpting, fashioning complex, new shapes and dimensions. Some strips are tightly twisted or braided, extending beyond the edge of the surface, while in others, they are woven or draped playfully within the confines of the canvas. The overall scale of the work often grows and swells in unexpected ways, with openings in the surface revealing the underlying structure and emphasizing the physicality of their creation.

In her work, Frater treats painting as an object rather than a mere image. She engages with the materiality of each piece, allowing the work to retain its own voice. By folding the surface like fabric, she disrupts the painted forms, creating new meanings through the physical gestures. The resulting textures offer a fresh perspective on the grids, stripes, and gradients often associated with abstract art. Frater’s large woven paintings are intensely physical, while her smaller works are experimental in both form and color, each piece embodying her improvisational approach to the medium.

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**FIONA DEBELL** has exhibited widely at notable venues, including the Art Gallery of Hamilton (Hamilton, ON), The Artist Project (Toronto, ON), The Other Art Fair (Brooklyn, NY), Collective 131 (Toronto, ON), KW (Toronto, ON), Noodle Gallery (Toronto, ON), Paula White Diamond Gallery (Waterloo, ON), The Art Gallery of Burlington (Burlington, ON), Signet Contemporary Art (London, UK), and 100 Kellogg Lane (London, ON), among others. Debell is currently represented by Gallery 133 (Toronto, ON), Kefi Art Gallery (Toronto, ON), and White Galleon Gallery (Thorold, ON).

**JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER** received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL, and a BA in Philosophy from the University of Dayton, Ohio. Her work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at the Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, OH), El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe (Santa Fe, NM), Images Festival (Toronto, ON), Ben-Gurion Airport (Tel Aviv, Israel), Kulturhuset (Stockholm, Sweden), THE MISSION Gallery (Chicago, IL), Tiger Strikes Asteroid (Chicago, IL), GAVLAK Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), Transmitter Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), The Reinstitute (Baltimore, MD), and McKenzie Fine Art (New York, NY), among others. Jean Alexander Frater was a recipient of the Working Artists Grant in 2014 and a BOLT resident at the Chicago Artists Coalition from 2017 to 2018. Frater is also the Director of Material, a non-profit, artist-run project space.

**For more information, contact Lola Shepard**

E: [info@LolaShepard.com](mailto:info@LolaShepard.com)

T: 917-771-5777

W: [LolaShepard.com](http://LolaShepard.com)