

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

LONGFORMS

Martha Jackson Jarvis: Elemental Equilibrium

By Becket Gourlay



Installation view at Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC | Photo: Adam Reich

"I'm especially interested in the act of making itself: movement, the exploration of materials, and their innate properties. The hand becomes a record of action, revealing new possibilities through process and discovery."

- Martha Jackson Jarvis

Martha Jackson Jarvis is not interested in direct depiction or replication, preferring the freedom, innovation, and complexity that she finds in abstraction. She identifies energy and becomes both a conduit and a researcher, visually translating vibrations or creating centers where said vibrations can gather and concentrate. Her second exhibition at Susan Inglett Gallery, *Elsewhere*, gathers works by Jarvis made from 2024 to 2026 that highlight these interests and also display her various media, from framed works on paper to monumentally sized, mixed-media wall hangings.

Two of Jarvis' signature large-scale works face one another in the main gallery. A chrome plate suspends the works, which unfurl from the wall like craggy, rippling banners, rife with texture and color. The eponymous work, *Elsewhere*, is from 2024 and employs the bold stripes and topographical swaths of paint and paper that are hallmarks of prior exhibitions in which Jarvis responded to an unearthed family history, conjuring the

*Elsewhere, 2024*

environments and emotions of an ancestor's experience through abstraction. Their paths of travel, represented by uniform, parallel stripes that Jarvis refers to as "way-finders", become muddied as they intersect and vanish behind mottled outcroppings of painted canvas. Swirls of blue swing out from the edge of the work, eddying like tides or currents and studded with silver. Glancing at the colors and composition reveals a subtle demarcation, where land meets sea, or sky meets horizon. This "emotional landscape" feels earthen and aqueous, Jarvis summoning those natural elements with a keen eye.



Lightning, 2026

In contrast, 2026's *Lightning* hangs directly opposite, and while visual cues carry over, the work is a perfect foil for *Elsewhere*. A backdrop of dark, stormy gray is scattered with yellows, reds, and an orange that verges on neon. What were the liquid whorls of water now become curls of smoke, or tongues of flame. The stripes are further scattered and fragmented, generating a frenzied composition. *Lightning* is the fiery counterpart of *Elsewhere*, and this tension between opposing natural forces is where Jarvis seeks to situate the viewer. The titling feels liminal or "torn," not present, nor past, nor future, and not here nor there, but simply, elsewhere. This in-betweenness is bursting with potential energy, which Jarvis mines for inspiration. Jarvis' notes discovery, material or thematic, is central to her practice and her reason for making, and she looks to disparity and tension as fertile areas of exploration.

Energy is a resource that manifests variously, be it in storms, tides, connections between people, or across timespans, and Jarvis' work creates spaces for harnessing and focusing energy. Mandalas appear in every work in the exhibition, whether in totality or in unfinished curves. Three framed works on one wall come from her 2024 *Mandala Sky* series, ten works on paper that bring Jarvis' abstractions to a smaller scale but with no reduction in impact. In *Mandala Sky II*, the entire sheet is alive with washes and sprays of color. *Mandala Sky VII* and *IX* focus their forms more loosely, with the suggestion of circles appearing from within and around acrylic and oil forms.



(left to right) *Mandala Sky II, VII, and IX*, all 2024

In two larger and more recent framed works, *Centering Orange* and *Time Sketch II*, both 2026, the radial mandalas take center stage, from which further colorful abstractions seem to emanate. Jarvis refers to them as "portals," gateways or openings through which viewers can give or receive energy. Mandalas appear across cultural histories, the geometric symbols employed in spiritual practices as visual loci of focus, attention, and direction. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Tantric traditions all reference or directly involve mandalas as aids for meditation and creating spaces within the mind that are sacred and can

house divinity. Broadly, Jarvis synthesizes these applications as the mind recognizing forces greater than the self, and channeling mental energy as both a steadying tether and a source of galvanizing strength.

Whether in a frame or stretching across a wall, Jarvis' work has an overarching sense of scale, of corporeal presence. The works on paper contain the aforementioned gateways, drawing the eye ever closer to a proposed center, and the large-scale works dwarf the viewer and subsume the field of vision, asking one to enter into, or bear witness to, the altered space. There is an aspect of her work that pushes against the constraints of a traditional gallery or museum setting, a monumental quality that can be traced to her storied and ongoing public art practice.



Centering Orange, 2026



Time Sketch II, 2026

Taking commissions and making work meant for public, and occasionally passive, consumption gave Jarvis the freedom to pursue her love of painting and abstraction in her studio practice. And while there is a delineation between the work she makes for "us" and the work she makes for "her," they inevitably feed one another. Her public works aim to bring us closer to the natural world by drawing attention to our surroundings, just as her paintings create immaterial spaces for us to enter and become enveloped in. Jarvis' engagement with scale feels like an act of devotion to the natural world, her translation of nature's penchant for making us feel small, our confrontations with the sublime wrought in canvas and paint.

Jarvis indicates that the work engages and embraces time, how it moves, gathers, flattens, and leaves an imprint on both us and the world around us. The nearly hypnotic mandalas, ambitious scale, and fearless use of color are arresting, stopping a viewer in time for moments of ponderance and reflection. The viewer is recentered and grounded, each work a reminder of one's place in the grand scheme.

