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Left: Artist Jon Pestoni surrounded by paintings at his Los Angeles studio. He is represented in L.A. by the David Kordansky Gallery, where a show of his recent work is on view through May 23 (davidkordanskygallery.com).

DEPTH OF FIELD

Applying layer after layer of imagery, painter Jon Pestoni conjures alluringly complex works

The Los Angeles studio of painter Jon Pestoni is situated just off a strip of auto-body shops, with a backyard view of the verdant Forest Lawn Cemetery and the spires of its Genoese-style Great Mausoleum in the distance. Just as this setting juxtaposes gritty bustle and pastoral peace, the artist's creations combine contrasting visual elements into dynamic compositions—ones whose rich layers are so fully

developed they resemble multiple works superimposed upon one another.

Abstract painting, as Pestoni is quick to acknowledge, is a discipline that tends to look to the past. Not that the artist finds this limiting. "For me, now, everything is available," he says, referring not only to the range of colors he chooses to build his wild palettes but also to bygone styles, from the painterly gestures of Expressionism to the crisp, flattened forms of geometric abstraction. "I really want to use it all."

The large-scale canvases and works on paper he has created for his latest show—at L.A.'s influential David Kordansky Gallery, through May 23—demonstrate a deepening complexity in his polyglot practice. "Lately I've been interested in bringing the background forward while having what you think of as the foreground stay in the back," says Pestoni, explaining the logic underpinning his lyrically raucous accumulations of streaks, splotches, and swirls. Concerned with how the eye merges these strata of brushstrokes, he devises a specific color hierarchy for each painting, using a key hue to tie it together. "The elements that I finish with are often the same ones I start with—I just have to go the hardest way to get there. It's a kind of improvisation that happens." To add texture, he might impulsively throw in a dash of ceramic granules (actually kitty litter) that absorb the paint, producing eye-catching fissures that reveal hidden earlier layers.

Driven as much by spontaneity as by rules, Pestoni thinks of his work in musical terms. "There's an orchestra playing, but the performers—all the colors, all the shapes—are warming up, testing their instruments at the same time," he says. "I'm trying to make that moment the finished piece." —KEVIN MCGARRY