

JUXTAPOZ

Art & Culture

Summer Wheat: A Clean Slate

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art // February 06, 2020 - May 24, 2020

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I've always been a messy person. I was a messy kid, a messy teenager, and a messy adult, always operating out of chaos. It's what made sense to me. And my studio was no different. Piles of failed paintings, jumbles of failed sculptures, and boxes full of junk-filled my space. I soon moved to a new studio space that was so large, open, airy, and light-filled that I thought I couldn't possibly feel cluttered or overwhelmed by my stuff anymore. A few years passed, and one day I sat up, looked around my studio, and realized that I was once again in the same situation. I realized that no matter how large my studio, no matter how much space I had, I'd always fill it up with as much stuff as would fit, holding on to every abandoned painting, every old tube of paint, and every bit of string or wire until there was no room to move.

I decided to throw everything away. I was organized in my approach, breaking it down into quadrants and working through one section at a time. At the end of the arduous process, I felt like I had unearthed an entirely new planet that existed just beneath the surface of the one I'd been living on; a planet that was more open and free.

I finally loaded the gigantic pile into a moving truck and took it out to the dump, where I was told it weighed an entire ton. I began to unload my own debris, all these old jettisoned paintings with their colors still bright in the sun, glittering little pieces from this or that project, all the lost paint

caps. I noticed that all my trash was multicolored and felt like I was tossing chunks of the rainbow out over the grey sludge.



I didn't know it then, but I was starting my practice and my life anew. I'd let go of all the clutter of the past in order to have space for something new to take shape. Now, when I scrub the floors of my studio, when I clean the walls, windows, sink, and doors, I treat it as an act of purification. I want to create a space clean enough that I can wear white shoes to work every day and not get them dirty. Cleaning my studio is now just as much a part of my practice as painting or drawing. I can't really do anything in my studio unless it feels clean. I need space. I need the studio itself to feel like a new, clean, blank canvas. —[Summer Wheat](#)

Summer Wheat lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Her solo show, Blood, Sweat, and Tears, will be on view at the [Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art](#) from February 6, 2020 to Sunday, May 24, 2020.