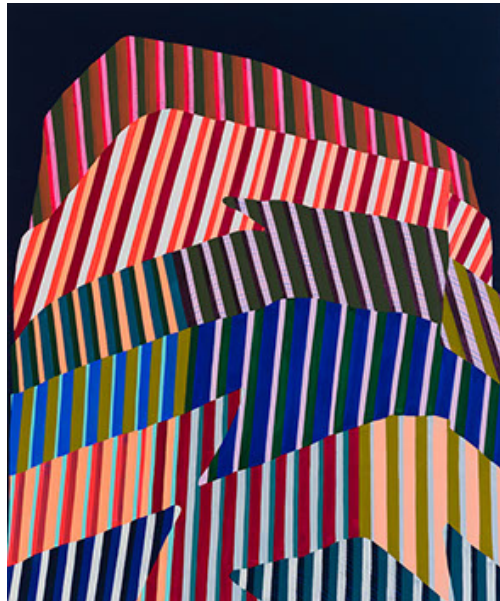


## **“Paint Piles” by Natalie Lanese, River House Arts, Toledo, Ohio,**

*by K.A. Letts*

The vibrant paintings, prints, drawings, and installations of Natalie Lanese aren't shy about calling for your attention. The Day-Glo colors, jazzy patterns and layered textures that characterize the work of this Ohio artist are ready to reach out and grab you. Or hug you. Or mug you.

The artworks in her solo show “Paint Piles,” at River House Gallery in Toledo, Ohio from February 19 to March 22, represent elaborations on the visual themes and strategies for which she is well known, but this new, more intimately scaled body of work shows that time and thought have tempered her youthful ebullience into a more considered form.



Natalie Lanese. Left: *Day Heap*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, 48" x 40". Right: *Night Heap*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, 48" x 40".

Now working and living in Cleveland, Ohio, Lanese has enjoyed considerable regional success in the years since her 2007 graduation from Pratt Institute. Last year, she was one of ten Ohio artists working in paper selected for “Paper Routes: Women to Watch 2020-Ohio.” Her paintings have been featured in the publication *New American Paintings*, and she recently received the Ohio Arts Council Fellowship 2019 20 under 40 Leadership Award.

Lanese's work depends on her inventive process for its offbeat visual charge. By manipulating cut paper in three dimensions—folding, twisting, cutting—and then extrapolating it into two-dimensional compositions, she synthesizes a vertigo-inducing world where illusory space is never static. It shifts and oscillates—it dances. Her innovative strategy grew from years of working in collage and from painting three-dimensional objects in installations so that from different vantage points they appeared to flatten into the surrounding space. That technique has been, and remains, a signature procedural device in the generation of her painted artworks.

On her website, she explains her method: “Collage serves both as a sculptural and conceptual expression: flat layers, cut-out images or objects that I arrange within, on or in front of the painted surface that deceive spatial perception.”

In "Paint Piles," the graphics-inflated flatness of Lanese's earlier work has given way to a thoughtful exploration of the liminal space a few inches in front of—and behind—the picture plane. She engages in a constant, inventive dialogue between illusions of depth and flatness; the directionality of her signature stripes suggests the slip and fold of tectonic plates. Although her current work remains resolutely formal, the paintings have taken on the quality of geological features. They are reminiscent of promontories heaving up from below the earth or, alternatively, of the parallel layers of sedimentary rock formations.

Two medium-size paintings, *Day Heap and Night Heap*, project a distinct impression that giant striped boulders are cheerfully looming and about to overwhelm the viewer. A sense of imminent peril provokes a distinct urge to step out of their path.

Lanese's series of works on paper, *Pile Study 1-3* and *Pink Pile Study*, reprises the lumpy, massy effects of *Day Heap* and *Night Heap*, but in this smaller iteration, they begin to take on qualities of a mysterious figure, a comic menace dimly seen through static-y layers of pattern. In contrast to the opaque patterning of her other paintings, these works show the artist beginning to explore the possibilities of layering textures to achieve the illusion of space and air within the pictorial space.



Natalie Lanese. Left: *Shape Tectonics (Orange)*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, painted found objects, 70" x 50". Right: *Shape Tectonics (Pink)*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, painted found objects, 70" x 50".

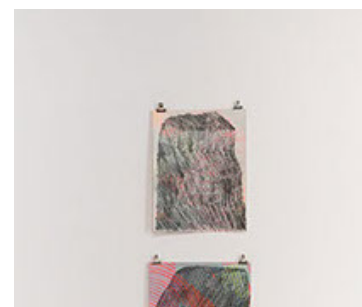
In a pair of larger works, *Shape Tectonics (Orange)* and *Shape Tectonics (Pink)*, Lanese uses Band-Aid-colored compositional elements to provide some negative space and much-needed relief from high-pitched chromatic incident of her earlier work and introduces a more horizontal component to the composition. She remains devoted to the splashy neons of her earlier work, but now juxtaposes them with more subdued, grayed-down colors that are suggestive of house paint. The Day-Glo colors appear to float in front of the picture plane, spilling over slightly onto the bricks that support the paintings.

*Relief Pile*, a modest-sized, painted relief hung on a painted wall—a kind of painting within a painting—seemed to me to suggest the most productive future path for Lanese's exploration of fictive space. Here, the militantly regimented stripes have loosened into elongated lozenges; the colors are more subdued. She skillfully manages the viewer's impressions within a narrow band of perceptual territory, creating a visual brain teaser that shifts and subverts expectations. Also, it's quite fun to look at.

Natalie Lanese's "Paint Piles" marks a moment in her ongoing journey of creative exploration. It is also an opportunity for her to pause and take stock of where the work is at and where it's going, in conversation with her audience. This collection of artworks provides both a promising snapshot of the artist's art practice now and a roadmap for her future course.

Open by appointment, during the pandemic, masks required. River House Arts is located in the historic Secor Arts Building, 425 Jefferson Ave., Toledo, Ohio. (419) 441-4025. To view Natalie Lanese's work online, go [here](#).

K.A. Letts is the Detroit editor of the *New Art Examiner*, a working artist ([kalettsart.com](#)) and art blogger ([rustbeltarts.com](#)). She has shown her paintings and drawing in galleries and museums in Toledo, Detroit,



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Natalie Lanese, *Pile Study I, II, III, IV*, 2021, acrylic and graphite on paper, each 14" x 10 3/4".

Chicago and New York. She writes frequently about art in the Detroit area.



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Natalie Lanese, *Relief Pile*, 2021,  
Foam, acrylic, Flashe, gouache, vinyl,  
34" x 29" x 2"

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