

Christina M. Strassfield Interviewing Peter Dayton Glitter Series 2022

Christina Mossaides Strassfield - Museum Director/Chief Curator of Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, New York. This title was given to her in January 2009. She had been the Curator at Guild Hall Museum from 1990 -1996, she returned in 2002 and remained until 2022. As of November 2022, Strassfield was named Executive Director at Southampton Arts Center in Southampton, New York.

Peter Dayton: Hi.

Christina M. Strassfield: Hi, Peter. It's great to be in the studio!

PD: Thanks. It's great to have you.

CMS: Well, I'm so excited by this body of work. As you know, it's something that I've told you personally. I'm not a big fan of glitter and I'm not a big fan of Tondos and I'm here and I'm blown away by it all. So for me, it's very exciting and you're opening my mind and challenging me. And that's all good, that's all good.

PD: Right. Wow. I'm not really known for challenging curators. Well, maybe I am, I don't know. I am now though I guess it's official.

CMS: You are now! It's official and we love it. It's a good thing to have.

PD: Great.

CMS: So let's just start at the beginning...

PD: Okay.

CMS: When did you first start using glitter? Because this body of work is a new body of work that harkens back but is different because it's extremely different. Right. So let's talk about when you first started using glitter and how that came about.

PD: Okay. So I first started using glitter in 1997, shortly after my first show in Chelsea with Paul Morris Gallery, where I showed the flower collages. One day I was at Pearl Paint on Canal Street, long gone now, and as I was checking out, I looked and there were these bottles of glitter and I went, Oh my God, I'm doing seed catalog flowers. What if I did glitter? That would be really, like, really strange. And so I bought some glitter and I started making some geometric pieces. I made like ten small ones and a couple of mid sized ones and showed them to various people. One of them was Bob Colacello, who I gave a piece to because he already liked what I was doing and he was mad for it. He said, These are great. They're like, pop meets minimalism. All these different things are going on. Very interesting. And then now he's seeing the newer work and he's really thinking like the eighties and Studio 54, and gay culture and just he wants to write about it you know eventually for a show or something and he said to tell you that. And then I showed Paul

Morris who I was showing the flowers with. He goes, Peter, I can't, I can't just say, okay, here this.... He's also selling this... You know, he just said, I can't do both at the same time. It's too confusing for people. And I said, I totally understand. And in the meanwhile, I gave a few pieces to a good friend of mine and a few other people and that friend Chuck Coyle, who's been a longtime friend out here, we used to house paint together. He's a photographer, lives in Springs. Said, you know, I've been looking at the pieces every night for 20 years. And they're amazing. You got to start it up again. And that's what happened. So here I am, a year and a half later, and I just did 12 months of this in this new studio, and there's 20 large pieces. So it's... it's and the first big one I did. You were the one that came and said, you need to go big. Do you remember?

CMS: Absolutely.

PD: So it's your fault that they're really good!

CMS: And they're really big and we love it!

PD: And and as soon as I made the first one, I was like, Oh my God, these are great big. So I'm really excited about that.

CMS: They absolutely lend themselves. I could see it in the smaller pieces and the different sizes that you had done, which were all probably under 18 inches?

PD: Oh yeah, probably. Yeah.

CMS: And as you got bigger, it really changed the whole scope of it, the dimensions of it, and really the presentation.

PD: Mm hmm.

CMS: I also loved the idea that they could be stacked next to one another. And again, you've done some really interesting things creating the diptychs now and the triptychs with these works. And there's a tremendous push and pull with all of these. So talk about how you went. You went larger on my recommendation, but how did you decide to go with the diptychs and the triptychs? How did that part of it come about?

PD: Well, I've always liked that period of, you know, A-B X and minimalism where it was sort of like people were partitioning things and putting things together, not just one single canvas saying, this is it. This is finite. And also it was very convenient in terms of size, because if I make a single piece at ten feet by eight feet, you know, it's not like you can put it in the car and drive it over somewhere. So that's kind of like a real consideration. And then also the idea of the diptych lends a power to it that it shouldn't have.

CMS: Absolutely.

PD: Which is what this glitter can do. I just... it's just uncanny what it does sometimes. So. So that's what that's what that's about.

CMS: Now, when you're working on them, Peter, do you start originally with the concept, thinking of it in a smaller form and then play with that and then go to a different

size? Or what is your process?

PD: My process is totally intuitive. I take the canvas, put it on the table, get the tape-measure, the pencil, and make a grid. And then I decide, am I making big squares? and the squares going to be the same? Is it going to be lines? Parallel, horizontal, or its going to be circles. And I just start. I just start. And the goal is to get glitter down in those spots, get it down, first coat of what it looks like, and then go from there. And usually they're all like three or four times later, it's the finished piece. There's a lot under it all too.

CMS: Do you ever go too far?

PD: It's glitter. I've already gone too far. I'm, as Christine Berry said, "you're all in."

CMS: Absolutely.

PD: Or did you say that?

CMS: I don't remember, but I totally agree because I feel like it's so there.

PD: Right.

CMS: We went from the grids. We have some wonderful circles that I just saw, which are amazing. So remind me, at first I thought. Damien Hirst. But it's very different. And your use of the two different sizes of glitter. So when did you first start adding, doing that? Adding the different size? Which create a wonderful dimension to the work.

PD: Right. So what I did was I decided that in order to do this, I would have to get glitter from the factory and not from the store. I could have done that, but that would have been like 50 bottles on one panel. So I called Glitter X, which was the original company of the glitter that I saw at Canal, and they've been there since the sixties in New Jersey, and I had to order like \$900. It was a minimum order. So I still have pounds of it, I have bags of it, and I got like six colors. And they ended up sort of all mixing together. And the further I went with it, I realized how many sizes there are because they sent me these booklets with the product, what it was, what it did, what it was made of, and what sizes you could get. So, but, that was very difficult for me to order or figure out. So I ended up starting to go to Michael's, the craft store, and buying large bottles of different sizes. And I mean, some of the colors are just awful. But when I get them, I can make it work. So I've been using this really weird orange color, which is in one of the pieces behind you, which is right there.

CMS: Oh yeah.

PD: There's this weird orange which turns into like a pumpkin thing, and then these pinks and stuff. So. So, yeah, the sizes really, really changed a lot of things, too, because I can get more kind of back and forth, push pull with it. And, you know, you kind of put the fine stuff in the background if you can, and go from there. So in this one, on top of the regular silver has this silver that you saw out there, which is literally like this and those I don't know how they do it, but those pieces of glitter have the entire color spectrum on the single piece as you walk by it. Don't ask me how they do that, but it's some kind of laser technology. It's crazy.

CMS: Oh my goodness. So the colors primarily are. Well, they are actually I was just going to say they are primarily sort of paste-ly, but there are some very intense hues there, such as the green, which is really wonderful. Intense green.

PD: Right.

CMS: Almost like a forest green.

PD: Right. I mean, on the grid one right there?

CMS: Grid right.

PD: There.

CMS: Yeah.

PD: Well, that, the earlier work was very contrasty like that. And I used the pure color. The later stuff now is, I'm kind of going in with, with, with the actual, with those kind of colors and then covering them and bringing it back to sort of towards a monochrome.

CMS: Absolutely.

PD: Which I find kind of mysterious.

CMS: And as we were just walking through, you mentioned the idea of painting with a different media.

PD: Right.

CMS: Painting with glitter. And you can absolutely. What you've just said is all about that. So your whole contribution of doing it in this way and mixing the colors and not, and using, you know, straight as we would use straight from the tube as you do mixing.

PD: Right.

CMS: This is all part of your process...

PD: Right.

CMS: Looking at and people would not necessarily know that you're first looking at that. So that's wonderful that you brought that up.

PD: Right.

CMS: Your new work, which I just love this piece here. Oh, which again, to me, again, harkens, as you said, back to the abstract expressionists and, you know, Clyfford Stills throwing paint, projecting it and having going from the grid patterns to the circle patterns and everything that is just sort of very delineated to a very looser movement.

PD: Right.

CMS: So can you talk about how that came about?

PD: Um Yes. The few times I've tried to do gestural things without the grid, it kind of looks like art, if you, you know what I mean.

CMS: Yes

PD: It's kind of like it doesn't transcend itself. It's like, oh, he's mark making and then filling it in. And so it's a really hard thing to do. This one I just said, Damn it, I'm just going to do it. So I just took a brush, loaded it, and started slashing, and then put some silver down and said okay, and then the blue. And then I filled in around the blue and I'm like, This is pretty cool. I think this one really works. It's going to be interesting to see if I can keep making it work because I don't want to cross over into that thing where it's totally A-B X or totally derivative in terms of its subject.

CMS: Right. Well, even the way you've handled the circles and I mentioned Damien Hirst, but it's not, it's totally unique. It's totally your own vision for it. So, again, maybe you're thinking about things, but you are making it your own. You're clearly bringing your own individual palette, sense of sensibility and everything going forward into it. Um, Tondos, again, another thing I said, I'm not a big fan of Tondos. Yeah, I find that these are quite amazing and they really, really work. They work individually, and I think they really wonderfully work as an installation. Almost like what you have here creates a fantastic installation. So again, why a Tondo?

PD: It's kind of, I mean, most people wouldn't even, just don't even know what the word Tondo is. So I find it really specific again to A-B X and Pop, and I always thought it was very curious to have a round canvas, kind of kitsch, kind of weird because you want a square or a rectangle usually. But I just think for this where I'm doing these planetary kind of things, it just it just sings. It's just great, you know? Big. I haven't gone there. Can you imagine?

CMS: You have to go there!

PD: Gonna do it.

CMS: But again, what's wonderful here, Peter, as I'm looking at it, we have the Tondos and we have a lot of the other pieces together and it's created a wonderful, again, visual play. So we have the circular Tondos with the circular planetary figures. We have the grid patterns, we have sort of the overall pieces going forward and the diptych. And yet together, there's a wonderful unifying... and it works, it just really works. And again, if I were looking at it individually, I would not think that it works together. So there's an energy and a synergy between all of the individual pieces.

PD: Right.

CMS: Let's talk about this one over here, which has, is not the background.

PD: Yes.

CMS: It's not filled.

PD: Right.

CMS: So is that one unfinished or is that meant to be that way?

PD: I really like it. I'm not sure what I'm going to do. There's no reason I can start leaving bare canvas either.

CMS: Well, again, what would come to mind was, again, some of the other works that you've done, of course, obviously sort of the surfaces which are very smooth and very void of the human... human?

PD: The hand.

CMS: Of the hand. And again, what's wonderful about this is that you have that juxtaposition of the two elements together. So um, I think, I think, I do think that really works. And it will be interesting to see where you go with that, because I think both obviously work. But again, this harkens back to your other, so the idea of working with texture after for so many years, not working with the texture. Can you talk a little bit about that?

PD: Yes, it's really exciting. And I think of so many artists who really loaded things on and made things come off the canvas and stuff like that. And the glitter just does it for me. I mean, it's just great. It's really amazing because when you walk closely, it's just wild what the eye sees' in there. There's just so much going on.

CMS: Absolutely. Absolutely... Energy. Power.

PD: Energy like a, like a, late Larry Poons or like a, that kind of almost where it could go. If it was paint, I'd probably go muddy, like he did, you know what I mean? On purpose, kind of. But no, its, the glitter is always helping me.

CMS: Absolutely. I think there's a tremendous energy to it and a power going forward. Um, the relationship... I love this, that you just hung, one of your earlier pieces.

PD: Mm hmm.

CMS: The collage pieces, right next to the diptych.

PD: Mm hmm.

CMS: Sort of that with a silver, black and white feeling to it. Next to the black and white of that piece.

PD: Mm hmm.

CMS: Do some of your earlier pieces. Does the pattern, does the imagery, or does the color palette affect some of the newer work?

PD: I would say not, but because now I'm just working with the grid and none of that flower work was about grids or order really. It was just about starting on the top left corner and going down and, you know, putting, overlapping things that don't belong together and, you know, creating that kind of energy and depth in the piece. The piece, even though it looks like it's flat and kind of you know, it has some depth, too. But, you know, the glitter is really some, I'm so free now. I'm so free, of like, convention and technique and things, it feels great.

CMS: That's wonderful. Again, what brought my mind to that is when I'm looking at these the planetary ones and sort of the relationship of the different pieces, the way you have it layered one on top of each other. So that's what came to mind when I was looking at that. I see what you're saying there. That's perfect. That's really, really perfect. So do you envision sort of a, I guess I envision, a wall where you might have individual pieces, but a wall where it really would be an installation, where you would take over the whole space, perhaps completely covering it over in glitter?

PD: Hmm? Where's this idea coming from? Who thought of this? Is someone projecting? I think I. You know. I see. Kind of like I would love to do a show in a space that the conventional white box that's not too big and put four or five large pieces and a few small ones so people can step back, so people can not be overwhelmed. But you're overwhelmed even then, I find. And why not just go all the way and completely overwhelm? I don't think it would be... I don't think it would be sour or would turn in another direction that's not intended. I think, O think they just keep, the energy just keeps coming from the refraction. So the more you refract, the more the eye is just like, oh, oh, you know, it all works. It all looks good. So that's important to me.

CMS: Absolutely, I'm one of those people, I love the idea of having white space around the pieces, and again, I guess the white space around all of your work here, in this wonderful studio, creates, again, a wonderful setting for it. But your eye does jump from one piece to the other, which is kind of again overwhelming and overwhelming in the best way.

PD: Mm hmm.

CMS: Can we talk about the targets a little bit? Again, the targets for something. But, of course, you know, we were always thinking of our predecessors who created them.

PD: Sure.

CMS: But again, creating it in glitter like this totally transforms it. **PD:** Right.

CMS: So can you talk a little bit about that?

PD: Right. So in 97, when I started, I had a bunch of targets on rectangles and squares, and some of them are... most of them ended up being very muted. I can show you some

other time. They're up in the loft here, wrapped up. But that's all about Jasper Johns and Noland. And it's just 1965 again. I mean, I can't. I can't. You can't. Certain paintings, certain periods of painting. I, I kind of like, I'm stuck on them. And, and then one of the last real periods for me would be Warhol. And then I like minimalism a lot, too. But then I start to, like, waver about what what's important to me. And I'm not getting much, if any, inspiration from the newer things I see because I don't I don't gravitate towards, um, you know, figuration, especially neo-figuration. And I find it very curious that um, that there's so much of it, and there's so much like paintings of interiors and, and just simple paintings of, of kind of domesticity. So I say, well there was Bonnard, so why are we I am like, Why are we doing this now? But I guess the world keeps just becoming new again. I don't know. I mean, how do you feel as a curator when someone shows you something that they think is really new and then you say, Well, well, it is sort of new. Do you do that?

CMS: Absolutely. And that happens over and over again. I think when I first came out here, coming from the city, I was surprised that there was so much abstract art here because in the city at that point, no one was doing abstract, or very few people were doing abstract.

PD: So it was second gen or...

CMS: Third generation, you know, going forward. And so it was very, very different. And again, I felt like, wow, they're doing it and they were doing it... and a lot of artists were doing it in the same spirit. It was a changed and I was very surprised. I said to myself, Why are they doing it then? That if it's not going to be anything different or their own innovation, their own take on it, it was, it just seemed to me that it was more of the same and there was no explanation for what they were doing and why they were doing it. So for me, I don't mind when someone goes back to figuration as long as they put their own touch on it.

PD: Right.

CMS: Their own individual statement...

PD: Right, Right.

CMS: And so for me, that works.

PD: Right.

CMS: But I could see where... um you do.... the idea where the inspiration comes through and you can see a lot of the certain inspiration in these works and even in relating to some of your earlier pieces. You know the relationships are there, with minimalism, you know, pop art, all of them are coming through very loud and clear. But it is your own individual vision and your own stamp that you put on. Right?

CMS: And I think that's the most important thing for any artist's going forward and to keep going forward.

PD: Right. I think I have a natural intuitive gift to somehow come up with something that is just sort of tweaked in a way that like you don't expect. And I'm really proud of that. And

um I think I really nailed it on these glitter things because they're just so much fun. I just can't believe it there.

CMS: Absolutely. And I want to share that. I first saw them when you had them on Facebook.

PD: Right.

CMS: Facebook and social media...

PD: Instagram.

CMS: Oh, Instagram, Instagram, right. So it was on Instagram. And again, I think during COVID, it was a wonderful thing to be able to see what people were doing and how artists were relating. And I remember seeing them and really immediately responding to them.

PD: Right.

CMS: Because I just felt like, Wow, this is so different, so unusual, so energetic. It just brought a wonderful energy. I think at a time when I think everyone's energy level was so low because we were all in hibernation.

PD: Right. Right. Right.

CMS: And so then when you invited me to come see them in person again, I was equally delighted by seeing them and getting that energy in person because seeing them on Instagram and social media is wonderful. But I think you really need to experience that. You need to stand in front of them. You need to have that light radiate.

PD: Right.

CMS: And you need to walk around them so that you see all the different manifestations coming out at you.

PD: Right.

CMS: And, and you sort of absorb that energy from them.

PD: Right.

CMS: So I really can't wait to see how this progresses because I think it is truly a wonderful body of work and it really deserves to be seen and to be moved on with.

PD: Oh, great. I'm so happy that you're here, and I'm so happy you saw my Instagram posts from two years ago because we've sort of been back and forth-ing, I've been here since '88 and I've asked you maybe, Oh, you should come. And, you know, you came and you really like it.

CMS: Yes. I absolutely do. I think it's something unique. It's totally different. And it's something, again, that you've transformed the use of the material and you've transformed the whole way you're approaching it. And again, it's painting with a new media. And that is something that is very rare, that is something that artists should strive for, at any level that they're doing.

PD: Right. Well, it's important to me because, as I just said, when I see a painting in oil or acrylic of figuration or some kind of interior or something, I say, why? Can't you make it new for me?

CMS: Right.

PD: And, you know, I know that's kind of snobby, but you know what I'm talking about. You know what you're saying?

CMS: Yes.

PD: I mean, if you're going to be an artist and you're going to be in it, you've got to have that something, Right?

CMS: Absolutely.

PD: So these definitely have it. And I'm so excited about that. And thanks so much for coming.

CMS: Oh, absolutely. Love it, Peter. Keep going.

PD: Thank you.