

TheWeirdShow^{lll}

PLEASURE AND DESPERATION: THE PAINTINGS OF MARY DIDOARDO

I AM LUCKY TO LIVE WITH A PAINTING BY MARY THAT I LOOK AT EVERY DAY. AT FIRST GLANCE, IT IS A BLACK SQUARE WITH RED LINES THAT DIVIDE IT INTO A LOOSE GRID. WITH BETTER LIGHTING, THE SURFACE THAT READS AS BLACK IS CLEARLY NOT SIMPLY BLACK, BUT COVERED WITH MARKS THAT BREAK THROUGH IT, REVEALING YELLOW AND RED. WHEN I TILT THE PAINTING, OTHER ENGRAVED LINES AND MARKS ALSO COME THROUGH FROM LAYERS BELOW.

I HAVE BEEN LUCKY TO FOLLOW MARY'S WORK OVER MANY YEARS, AND OVER TIME I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND HER PROCESS OF MAKING PAINTINGS AS A BACK-AND-FORTH BETWEEN BUILDING UP LAYERS AND SUBTRACTIVE ACTIONS. I RELATE THIS TO IN MY OWN WORK WITH COLLAGE, A METHOD SHE ALSO EMPLOYS. I VISITED MARY'S STUDIO IN LONG ISLAND CITY TO TALK ABOUT HER NEW BODY OF WORK FOR HER SOLO SHOW *STORY LINE* AT KATHRYN MARKEL FINE ARTS IN NYC FROM MAY 21 – JUNE 26, 2026.

-ANDREA BURGAY



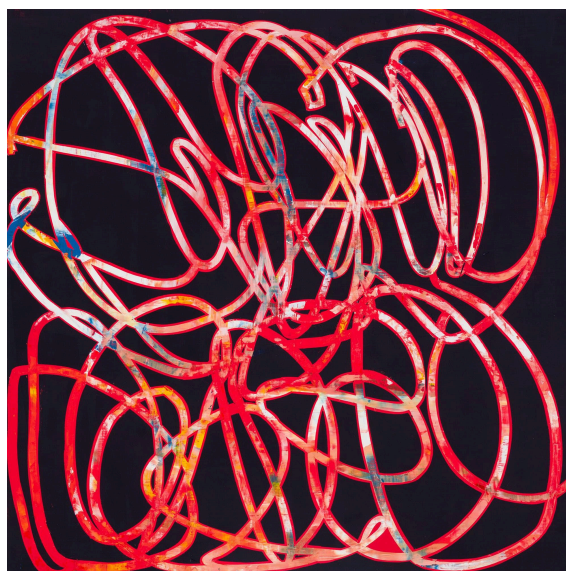
AB: Your paintings often appear energetic—full of movement and spontaneity—yet the process behind them is more complex than it might initially seem. Can you describe your approach to creating one of the paintings in your recent body of work and walk us through the trajectory of its creation, from the initial stages to its completion?

MD: The objective is always to make it look easy. Don't artists always want that? I work really hard to make that happen. There are certain steps I take to begin with and if all goes well it leads to a successfully accomplished painting. Of course, that is the exception to the rule. Out of eight paintings that will be in my show, four of them came fairly easily. By that I mean within five to six stages working on the whole painting at once overall, layer by layer. That's a very satisfying experience.

I work on cradled gessoed wood panels. My favorite sizes are 36" or 30" squares, or 30"x40" rectangles. The first layer of paint is a solid overall color. I use a mask a material with an adhesive backing that I lay over the entire surface of the panel. It works like a stencil, which is what I'm basically creating. Once it is used and removed it's a way of getting a clean, sharp line that I can't otherwise achieve by freehand. In my case, I use clear masking tape which works just as well as professional masking material, not nearly as expensive and I use a lot of it. I draw onto the mask, with a soft craypas. Its mark can be easily removed until I achieve a line that I like.

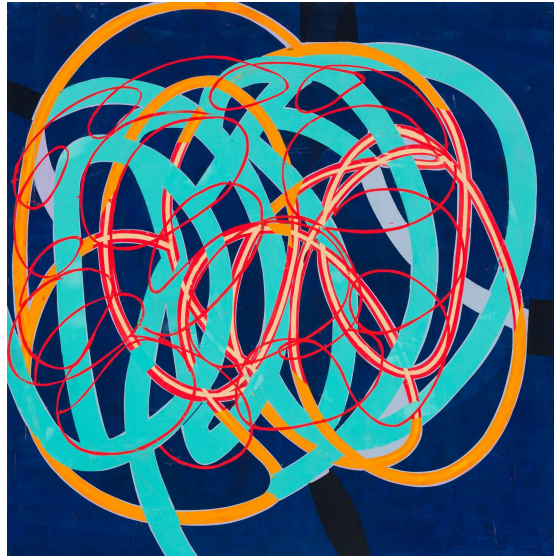
My first mark sets the defining pace for the rest of the painting. It's random and intentional all at the same time, acting on impulse, very improvisational. A few attempts are made until I'm ready to go with it and then I cut the line into the tape. Many small decisions are made along the way. Curves change and the nature of the lines are designed as I cut. How wide or how narrow? Will this line serve, during the process, as a negative or a positive? What color will the line be in consideration of the chosen ground color? Paint is spread over the negative areas where the tape was cut away and the masking is pulled off. I'm never prepared for how it actually will look and the challenge is on to make something of it. Once the paint dries, a new mask is reapplied overall and a complimentary line is drawn and cut. Considerations go into how one line plays into the other. What color to use, and is it thicker, thinner, or equal weight to the previous line? If all goes well, the layers build onto one another and compose themselves into something that surprises me in its cohesion. Just trying these things out, it's pleasure and desperation.

This painting *Let There Be Light* is a good example. I'm thinking it happened in three or four stages. The inner line was all one shot. It's definitely inspired by Gerhard Richter and the recent Jack Whitten exhibition at MoMA.



AB: What are some of the other strategies or techniques you use in your process?

MD: Drawing is an important element of my work. The nature of line is descriptive. Line creates space. I had an excellent instructor who taught us drawing by looking at Cezanne. He demonstrates a discipline of thinking and seeing through concentration on where and how things, at points of intersection, meet in space. This created volume, depth, and rhythm. That stayed with me. In my paintings there's this spatial environment going on. They're flat by nature of color and form but I'm defying the flatness with the constantly weaving line.



Introvert, 2026, oil on wood panel, 36"x36"

AB: Collage plays a role in your work both as a way of problem-solving—allowing you to experiment with color and composition—and as part of the layering, concealing, and revealing that occurs throughout your process. Can you talk more about the role collage plays in your practice and how you think about it?

MD: The process that I've described is how I prefer to work but it doesn't always bring success. When the painting doesn't happen, I must resort to other means and that is not nearly as much fun. This is where the collage aspect comes in, and has been a new part of the process in the past couple of years. I use swatches of colored paper to resolve the composition and it is slower and less immediate. I cut the paper shapes and tack them temporarily onto the painting to see if it's what I need. Then I remove the swatch and paint the shape in. This is precarious. I can lose some of the painting details that I've won in the earlier layers. I have resolved several paintings this way and they are successful but they have a different effect from the ones that rely on my more immediate impulses. To have to craft the shape is tedious for me.

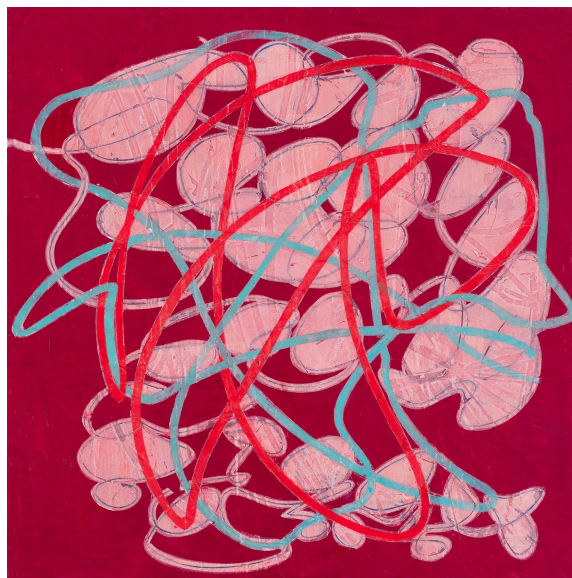
I treat the paint as a physical substance, not just the liquidity of it on the surface but as an element that you can alter or scrape away. The tape will also pull things up and offer some unexpected surprises so that's a process of removal as well. My paintings are very textured and that's comes completely from process. Previous actions and decisions are revealed in reading the physical surface of these paintings. They certainly relate to collage in that respect.



Little Egypt (detail), 2025, oil on wood, 36"x36"

AB: We also talked about how your background in sculpture informs your painting. Can you describe how this has influenced your work?

MD: In art school I was exposed to process and an emphasis on material. I took to sculpture naturally. Sitting on the studio floor using plaster or colored resins, pouring, cutting, breaking, building. We used sheet metal and masking tape to build rudimentary molds. Colored resins could be poured into the mold. Remove the mold and I had a linear shape with a wire sticking out of one end so that I could repeat the process until the sculpture declared that it was complete. Tilt the shape, turn it and build onto it. Color as form. The pieces that I made at that time were very linear. So I look back on that and the continuity is definitely there. Making art can be very physical. My paintings are very sculptural.



AB: The line has been a central element in your paintings for some time. Can you talk about the evolution of line in your practice, and how the double line developed and functions within these paintings?

MD: I just looked at my website. It appears that I've been using the double line since as early as 2015. I hesitate to compare my work with graffiti but I was on a train recently riding through urban areas where there was a lot of it. I noticed that they use the double line. It pops the image. That's why I use it. I began to incorporate fluid line into my paintings in 2012. Prior to that I was making a lot of figurative pen and ink drawings with a fine overlapping line. A friend gave me some wood panels to work on and that just triggered something. The hard surface allows me to work in a way that would be impossible on canvas or paper. I've been making these kinds of paintings ever since.

AB: Many of your titles offer an entry point into the painting, suggesting a particular way of seeing it. Where do these titles come from?

MD: There was a time in my earlier work where I would name my works "untitled". I got over that.

Now I'm shameless. I have fun naming them. I live with the painting until it evokes some words in my head. I play with the words, look up synonyms on my iPhone until something strikes a chord.

AB: Your upcoming exhibition *Story Line* opens at Kathryn Markel Gallery in New York City this May. As you've been reflecting on these new paintings, what has stayed with you from making them?

MD: I've been painting this body of work since late 2024. I've had more prolific periods but this was a difficult time in my life. I lost a long time studio and found a beautiful new studio. In late 2024 my husband died very suddenly. During one of the most difficult times in my life I kept on painting. Through this period of mourning my studio was a place to go to and my work sustained me. I was obsessive and worked hard. My husband and I had shared studios together for many decades and he was the one person that I relied on. I trusted his opinions on my work as it as in progress. I had to learn to judge my work on my own terms. *Story Line*, a solo show of the paintings of Mary Didoardo opens May 21 and runs through June 27, 2026 at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts 529 W. 20th Street, 6W, New York, NY 10011.

