



# ART REVIEW: The Fearless Palette of Melinda Zox Gives Color a Voice

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by Charles A. Riley II

In the artist's statement for her exhilarating "Conversation in Color" exhibition of paintings and works on paper at the [Quogue Gallery](#), [Melinda Zox](#) writes about painting being in her blood. Coming from the daughter of the brilliant abstract colorist [Larry Zox](#) and his wife Jean Glover Zox, also an artist, the statement can be taken literally. As the artist notes in the statement, her formative years presented "a continual lesson in the experience of art and creativity. Art, color and expression were part of our daily life and almost every conversation."

Her hereditary flair for the chromatic is everywhere on the brightly illuminated walls of the Quogue Gallery, especially in such [Mark Rothko](#)-like clouds of rose and azure as the closely related vertical works titled 8 and 9, which take the rectangular vocabulary of the Abstract Expressionist master and soften it with billowing curves.



"8" by Melinda Zox. Mixed media on paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.



"9" by Melinda Zox. Mixed media on paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.

To understand the substantial painterly accomplishment and fearless palette of Melinda Zox it helps to be familiar with her father's career. Larry Zox was part of Rothko's circle in the city, gaining in stature and reputation in the '60s and '70s. His own powerful paintings, tighter and flatter than his daughter's, can be found at MoMA, the Guggenheim and the Albright-Knox.

His East Hampton studio was a gathering place for many of the major names in Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting (including [Jackson Pollock](#) and his fishing buddy [Dan Christensen](#)). Melinda's brother Alexander wrote a moving memoir of their father and their East Hampton days that was published [by Hamptons Art Hub](#) while his paintings were exhibited at Berry

Campbell in New York in May 2017.

Reading that piece over in preparation for visiting the show in Quogue, and considering Melinda Zox's own eloquent writing, I could not help but feel a bit jealous of their lives with this charismatic, plugged-in figure from the heyday of heroic Abstract Expressionism. It also helped me understand how capable a colorist Melinda Zox proves herself, as in her handling of complex chromatic intervals between tangerine orange and blue in the softly seductive painting *10*.



"10" by Melinda Zox. Mixed media on paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.

In addition to influences rising from her upbringing, Melinda Zox studied at SVA under Frank Roth. She also makes a puzzling reference in the statement to the sculpture of [Michael Steiner](#), not exactly a household name today (unlike [Alexander Calder](#), another acknowledged influence) but better known when he was a darling of the influential critic Clement Greenberg. Sculpture, along with the architecture of Manhattan, offers the three-dimensional inspiration for her two-dimensional works, and the geometry of such jaunty paintings as *Blue Swag* has some of that *built* quality. I admired the way Melinda Zox started this Berlioz-like chromatic rhapsody with a slow movement.



"Blue Swag" by Melinda Zox. Mixed media on paper, 42 x 30 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.

Even the title of the pensive painting *1* has historical resonance, conjuring for me at least the shadow of [Barnett Newman's](#) *Onement*, a paradigm of origins that offers some of the same feeling of intensely meditative concentration upon a basic vertical form. Perhaps it's the writer in me, but I love the suggestion of an open book, like those curvy volumes found in some of the interiors of [Matisse](#) and [Leger](#), doubtless opened to a favorite passage that offers the mysterious subtext to the painting. The left side of Zox's spread is bright and at moments blank with some scribbles of black at a corner, but the right hand is filled with a purple that glows like wine backed by a late afternoon sun.

It seems ironic in an exhibition so filled with bright, exuberant color to pick out the black marks, but I followed the trail of black into a strong suite of paintings. The cross hatching on the left-hand border of *11* added an element of graphic complexity, a separate rhythmic motif to the gentle washes of color. This exchange is like a conversation (picking up on the title of this show:

“Conversation in Color”) between the black-and-white gestures of [Hans Hoffmann](#) (who is never far from any Abstract Expressionist question) and his student [Helen Frankenthaler](#).



“11” by Melinda Zox. Mixed media on paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.

The artist guides the viewer through the process in her statement: “As an artist, I work hard to develop paintings that speak both to me and to others about the beauty that exists in space, color and movement. I am drawn to color and influenced by bold, strong lines as well as dynamic powerful shapes. The work is grounded by quiet and still lines interrupted by layers of explosive energetic color. I feel exhilarated when I paint a new line of color interrupting the flat space creating movement, and flow. I layer the paint creating texture; building and adding more dimensions.”

Her boldest use of this black, as a painterly element and not just a drawing-type mark, is in *Black and White Rotation*, which combines acrylic and gouache in one powerfully concentric composition. This is one of the strongest moments in the show, with its vortex accentuated in three dimensions by a carefully interwoven grid of lines that suggest overlapping. This kind of overlapping leads to the basso profundo at the bottom of *Blackout*, which divides the day into bright noon and midnight held in one ambitious canvas.



“Black and White Rotation” by Melinda Zox. Acrylic and gouache on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.



“Blackout” by Melinda Zox. Acrylic and gouache on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of The Quogue Gallery.

Unlike the proliferation of husband-and-wife stories (Motherwell and Frankenthaler, Pollock and Krasner, [Josef and Anni Albers](#)), I was hard-pressed to find other salutary father-daughter combinations. Some connections include [Tony and Kiki Smith](#), followed at quite a distance by [Julian](#)

[and Lola Schnabel](#), [William and Andra Eggleston](#) and [Santiago and Sofia Calatrava](#). Based on the strength of the links between Larry and Melinda Zox, aesthetic correspondence between artist fathers and their artist daughters could make for a powerful theme for a much larger exhibition.

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**BASIC FACTS:** “Melinda Zox: Conversation in Color” is on view from October 21 to December 4, 2017, at the Quogue Gallery, 44 Quogue Street, Quogue, NY 11959. [quoguegallery.com](http://quoguegallery.com)

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