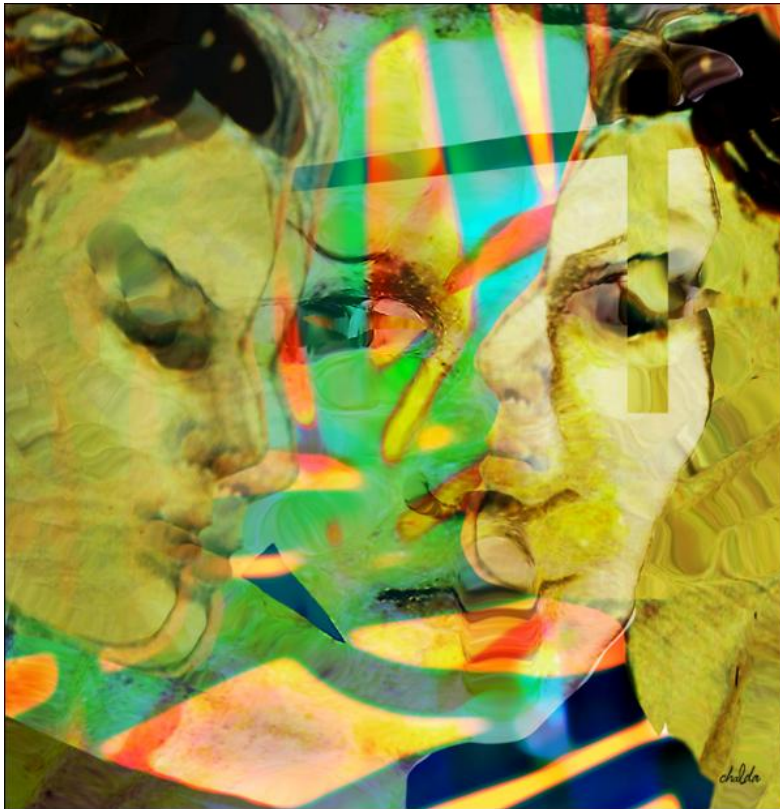


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Search Engines: New Digital Paintings by Chalda Maloff

at Ceres Gallery through June 22
by Dar Dowling

Chalda Maloff's work literally blew me away this week when I stepped into the Ceres Gallery in Chelsea to check out her new show "Search Engines". Maloff is a digital artist, and her paintings are exquisitely beautiful, with vibrant colors, an ever changing landscape of texture, and treasures hidden in their depths. They take you on an artistic quest that is as emotionally rich as it is visually compelling. She quickly draws you into her world through her paintings - with names like Seeing Without Looking, Lucid Dream and Whispers of the Heart - all leading you down a primal path inspired by the age old search for "insight, clarity, and meaning", with of course a technological twist, or two.



Whispers of the Heart
Pigment inks on paper mounted to acrylic
30x30 inches

“I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t an artist”, she said when I recently caught up with the Austin based artist, who was in town for the show. While up until ten years ago Maloff was a painter using actual paint, canvas and brushes, these days she makes art in the virtual world, using a tablet instead of canvas, a stylus rather than a brush, and software and printer ink in lieu of jars of paint and pigment, and with her work you never miss them – and neither does she.

When Maloff was in college she majored in Art history and went on to get a graduate degree in Computer Science. While she knew in theory it was possible to make art digitally, up until ten years ago, it was just distant dream. Yet when the tech was ready, so was she. “I threw myself into it...and I was hooked” she says. And she never looked back, nor did she go back to traditional painting. What does she love about it? Well that's easy, pretty much everything.



Good Fortune Arriving Veiled
Pigment inks on gloss paper, face-mounted to acrylic
30x30 inches

It may be easy to assume that using technology to create art is effortless, but that's not the case. Her process is as artistically intense and time consuming as actually pulling out a brush and painting, although it does allow her to do things she could never be able do in the real world, including mixing media, working in layers and delving deep into the details - with some really brilliant results. It is not unusual to see watercolors, charcoals and oil paint side by side in her work, making them visually rich, emotionally intriguing and deeply satisfying.

Maloff is well known for using geometric shapes reminiscent of ancient artisans and paintings that are always perfectly square, and those aspects are present in this show too. Yet she's also incorporated faces into her paintings for this series, so many in fact that it is possible two people could see the show together, and walk away having seen a different number of faces, because while some are obvious, others are meant to be discovered as time goes on.



Seeing Without Looking,
Pigment inks on paper, mounted to acrylic
30 x 30 inches

In fact while I was at the show I thought I found a “faceless” painting, but it was simply an illusion. When I gazed into its depths a second time, among the vibrant colors, textures and geometric shapes, there it was – a face, seemingly materializing out of nowhere. I was happy to learn I’m in good company – Maloff’s husband, who has seen the paintings many times. “When we were hanging one of the paintings my husband asked “has that face always been there?” She says. So, yes, her paintings really are about a constant state of discovery, and this is what Maloff had in mind from the beginning.

Her prints also radiate an inner glow that, well, feels really good, and perhaps that “good feeling” comes from a primal place. As Maloff points out during our chat “The effect of inner-glow or backlighting in my paintings alludes to the worship of warmth and light, which perhaps began with the ages of sun and fire worship and continues in this age of device and screen worship.” Weaved throughout her work is also a sense of spatial ambiguity, which is caused by surfaces that shift and change within the same painting - liquid, solid, rippling, smooth, and even reflective surfaces, are all a part of this dance.



Stranger at the Masked Ball
Pigment inks on paper mounted to acrylic
30x30 inches

Yet her work is also extremely personal, as is the case with Good Fortune Arriving Veiled, which just happens to be Maloff's favorite piece – and it's actually one of mine too. It is all about “when you have bad luck, and it turns out to be the best thing that could have happened”. This piece and the message was inspired by her mother, who when she arrived in the US, wanted nothing more than to have a house for her family - a dream house came out of nowhere, and then it fell through. While heartbroken, her parents put the money into a business that quickly became a success. Her mom died last year, but up until then she would always say “my best piece of good fortune was losing my dream house”.

All the pieces in this show have hidden, and not so hidden elements for the viewer to discover in their depths. Their titles definitely offer clues and are a big part of the artistic process for Maloff. So in typical high tech fashion she installed QR codes in the gallery, so all you need is a smart phone to unleash the secrets of Chalda Maloff.

more about Chalda at ceresgallery.org