



How Moving Back to New York Inspired Photographer Jill Greenberg to Create a New Medium



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Image via Jill Greenberg

Jill Greenberg has continually maintained the difficult career balance of commercial and fine art photography, finding great success in both realms. Rarely are contemporary artists able to create their own definitive style with as much grace, technical precision, and imagination as she has. And though **many photographers have tried to illegally replicate her work** (she has applied for a process patent for her new pieces), she remains a constant innovator. Her new series, "Paintings," not only represents a brilliant new direction for her, it's essentially the invention of a new medium—one that relies on timing and site-specificity to capture light reflecting on wet paint. Paintings are typically based on photographs, but Greenberg is instead taking photographs of paint.



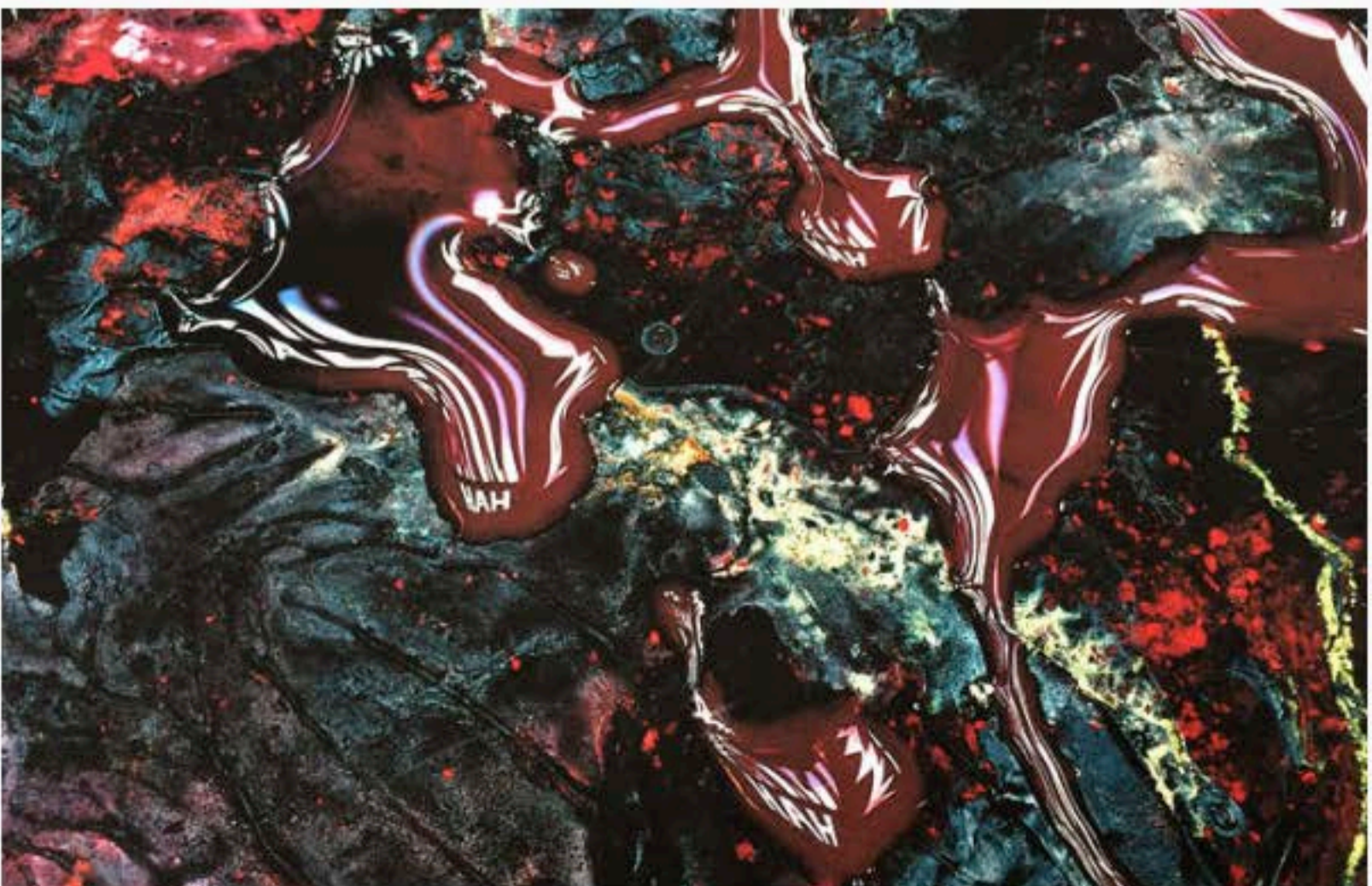
Work from the "Paintings" series by Jill Greenberg

Greenberg's move with her family from **her house in Los Angeles**, to a loft she purchased in New York in the '90s, directly inspired this new work. She experimented with putting paint on photographs many times in the past, and has, in a way, always digitally painted the images by hand-retouching them. She began printing photos in the darkroom when she was barely 10 years old and grew up drawing, painting, and sculpting. In fact, many people mistake her widely-seen, large-format photographs of monkeys and bears for paintings. Returning to New York and rediscovering her loft's skylights, after 12 years of living in Los Angeles, allowed her to find a new method—capturing the paint itself in transition. "I saw these crazy, fractal-looking shapes from the skylights because of all the lines," she says. "I was like, 'This is it.' Then I got into using stencils, too."



Work from the "Monkey Portraits" series by Jill Greenberg

The stencils create small, white stars, letters, and even the shape of a lightning bolt. One piece has "HAH" reflected humorously throughout it. Greenberg uses paintbrushes and plastic sheets to create the abstract, painted forms on glass, which sometimes intentionally resemble portraits. Looking even more closely at certain pieces, one can see clear reflections of the skylight and the camera—"a perfect sphere where you can really see the whole set-up," she says—offering a more open view of lighting that, in other contexts, she's kept very private and protected.



Detail of work from the "Paintings" series by Jill Greenberg

The pieces are being sold as unique, one-of-one images. When asked why she sells the photographs instead of the paintings once they dry, Greenberg says, "What you're looking at is light hitting paint, and it's wet paint, so it doesn't look like anything. When it dries, it becomes flat. The light is a part of the painting. The light has merged with the paint to make a new medium. The gestural brushstrokes become super blown up. At this larger scale, you can see the highlights better." It's an exploration of the hierarchy of mediums in the art world, which dismisses photography as merely source material or found imaging.

During **a lecture at the Annenberg Space for Photography** in 2011, Greenberg told the audience her story—going to college at RISD, exploring the female body and male gaze in her work, moving to New York, and becoming a Photoshop expert from the time the editing software was first released. She explained how feminism has been at the core of most of her personal projects, including the "Glass Ceiling" and "Horses" series, which were inspired by commercial commissions and childhood memories. They both show the lengths she goes to capture meaningful images.



Work from the "Glass Ceiling" series by Jill Greenberg

For "Glass Ceiling," Greenberg was inspired by a photo shoot with the US Olympic Synchronized Swim Team that made her think of the "set up" of being a woman. She says, "Inspired by the shoot's outtakes, I hired a local synchronized swim troupe in 2010 and directed the women with gestures as I sat at the bottom of a pool in full scuba gear with a state-of-the-art 65 megapixel back on my digital camera." Similarly, her childhood admiration of horses led to a series of photographing them and painting them in Photoshop, reflecting on their dual masculinity and femininity. She compared the horses to women **after discovering** "an illustration of a horse in a bridle with a woman wearing a 'scold's bridle,' which was a medieval punishment for mouthy women." Not by coincidence, Greenberg was working on both "Glass Ceiling" and "Horses" simultaneously, taking the time and physical effort to create the most compelling images possible.



Work from the "Horses" series by Jill Greenberg

As an artist who's had continual opposition following her successes, from people copying her work to **false accusations about how she creates it**, Greenberg faces another struggle with the "Paintings" series—the possibility that she will lose her home to a developer trying to turn the building's co-ops into condos. She says, "I've owned this loft for 18 years. I bought it for not very much money, but everyone in the building is trying to sell to the developer. I'm the only one who doesn't want to move. Our family is here, and there's a school close-by. I don't want to look for an apartment. I don't want to buy something. I can't afford to buy something. Sure, I'd get money, but not enough. I'd never have this skylight. So in the back of my head, I'm thinking, 'Maybe a judge will look at my art, and say, 'You can't kick her out, she's making art with skylights.'" I don't know. That's become part of it. I really don't want to be kicked out of a place that I know. I am having too much fun."

Visit "**Paintings**" at ClampArt (531 West 25th Street, New York) from February 19 to March 28, 2015.