



JUDITH LINHARES

by MADISON SMARTT BELL

Born in Pasadena, Judith Linhares came of age amid the social, cultural, and political sea changes of the 1960s in California. A working artist since her early teens, Linhares describes a world where dreamy sunlight shines on skeletons. A deep sense of the pastoral in her work is tempered by an acknowledgement of the macabre, a flair for the grotesque, and a sophisticated wit that both sharpens and lightens the images she makes.

For the first 20-odd years of her career, Linhares lived and worked on the West Coast, where, following an early phase of abstraction, she became a figurative painter. She made her first major raid on the New York art world in the *Bad Painting* show curated by Marcia Tucker for the New Museum in 1978.

In 1980, Linhares moved to New York, where she shares space and her life with conceptual artist/poet Stephen Sprenjak. During the last few years, many of the surface gestures of her style have been popularized by a generation of younger painters, but her *Rowing in Eden* show at Edward Thorp Gallery last spring reasserted her preemi-

nent mastery of a way of painting she has made her own throughout her 40-year career.

Linhares's work has deep foundations, in both the compositional and the psychological sense. Her long-established habit of beginning her paintings in abstraction gives her work a solid integrity of composition that few latter-day figurative painters can rival. Meanwhile, she has blended some iconographic tactics of Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo with the expressionistic power of James Ensor and Edvard Munch. "Linhares's imagery enters the subconscious on very much the same level as the artist herself finds it," as Dan Cameron wrote in 1985. The result is a system of psychological signification at once profound and accessible to all.

This interview with Judith Linhares began in Edward Thorp Gallery on March 21, 2006, soon after the opening of *Rowing in Eden*. The conversation continued for the next few hours in various downtown Manhattan venues, then for the next three months via email.

MADISON SMARTT BELL

I was in Edward Thorp Gallery gazing at your painting *Star Light* and trying to figure out why it reminded me of *Les Femmes d'Alger* when a mysterious dude standing nearby whipped out a digital device with that Picasso painting on its screen and began making the case that the second demoiselle from the left makes more sense as a reclining figure, as in *Star Light*, than as a standing one. As luck would have it, I was in MoMA the next day and looked at *Les Femmes d'Alger* along with some other Picassos, which made me wonder, what do you think of Picasso's treatment of women, and does it have any bearing on your own?

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Of course I respect and admire Picasso's work, but I have never thought of him as a model of good behavior. As far as his treatment of women, he was a man of his time. He felt no impediment to projecting his fears and sexual anxieties onto women and occasionally representing them as monstrous.

Women are the subjects of so much visual material in our culture. When I paint women, I am not thinking of them as beautiful objects or subjects but identifying with them, thinking about their relationships to one another and the viewer. In the '70s I painted a horrific mermaid holding a small sailor in her hand; he is wagging his anchor at her.

MSB And how about *Sailor II* [1982], where the woman in the boat looks like she is thinking about eating the male figure, who reminds me of a little black frog?

JL I forgot about that one. I guess the figure of the man-abusing Amazon was more present than I thought. It was not just a case of challenging men but changing the way women were perceived, and the struggle to share in the power structure.

MSB If I'm following you properly, your images of man-eating Amazons don't strike you as monstrous. I don't mean to be sarcastic! Even the most visceral reactions turn out to be a matter of perspective. I've run into a fair amount of that sort of surprise in crossing cultural boundaries, though less often on the gender frontier. My question is how you see the mood and feeling of those two paintings.

JL In those paintings, I am the monstrous woman, the man-luring siren waiting for unwitting sailors to cross my path. This is different from a man projecting his fear onto a woman. *Sailor* could be seen as the mermaid's reaction to being seen through the wrong end of the telescope, or it could be read as the man's search for guidance from the mermaid.

MSB So the images are completely unthreatening from your point of view?

JL It is a kind of parody. I also drew myself as Van Gogh with knife in hand, ready to slice my ear off. Playing the part of a powerful monster with an appetite for sailors or reversing the gender on the mythology of famous male artists was part of my coming of age as a young feminist.

MSB You're describing a contentious relationship with iconic male artists. It's not unusual for artists to do

battle with their influences. But do you regard Picasso and Van Gogh as influences? Are there others whose influence you accommodate with less conflict?

JL I don't regard Picasso or Van Gogh as direct influences; my crowd is more Max Beckmann, Edvard Munch, and James Ensor. I have chased these guys around the globe, thinking about how they make an image reside in the memory of the viewer. How did Munch arrive at such an economical image that, once seen, is in your head forever?

MSB Funny, I went to that huge Munch show at MoMA the same day I visited Picasso's *Demoiselles* there. I was struck by a lot of images beyond the anthology pieces I already knew. Did you have any favorites there?

JL At that show I fixated on a small painting called *The Coffin Is Carried Out*. I had never seen it before. It is so economically stated, and at the same time filled with information. A house with an open door and group of figures inside (briefly indicated, just lines and shapes), and another mass that represents figures, and a rectangular shape. I am impressed with Munch's ability to make a psychological reality with these pared-down elements. I like to think of Munch, Beckmann, and Ensor as ancestors—like my great-grandfathers.

MSB Your work seems to me to be a lot happier than what I've seen from those guys—at first glance, at least. I do feel like you have a rather less-morbid muse than Munch or Ensor, anyway.

JL Don't let my bright color and exuberant paint fool you! Both Munch and Ensor are expressing a sense of generalized anxiety. The edge in my work comes from growing up with the relentless California sunshine and blue sky—undetermined by earthquakes, wildfires, and mudslides.

California and Mexico are very interrelated in their visual culture. Any time you walk out the door, you might see donkeys painted like zebras, candy in the shape of skulls, piñatas representing swimming sharks. The combination of celebration and danger, sweetness and death is a real staple of California culture.

MSB Right—so many of the images in the *Rowing in Eden* show look like cheerful pastorals, but stay with them





BLAZE, 2005, OIL ON LINEN, 51 x 78"

and there are possibilities for mayhem under the surface. It's like the real grimness of the Grimm fairy tales. Do you have any interest in fairy tales as such?

- JL My paintings share a sense of place with many fairy tales: the cottage in the woods, the shack by the sea, the kitchen hearth. I also share the actions, such as eating a meal, mopping the floor, stirring porridge. These would all seem to be rather life-affirming on the surface, but we all know that Snow White's stepmother has it in for her because she will be a sexual competitor soon. Rapunzel has to live alone in a tower to pay for her mother's appetite for forbidden greens.

Oedipal conflicts, sibling rivalry, unsatisfied desires, and forbidden curiosities make up the psychic reality of fairy tales. The combination of the conventional environment and the underlying violence is expressed in my work through the use of color and the movement of the paint. In *Wild Nights*, for example, the fire burns a little too bright and a little too big. The orb in the painting *Star Light* is a bit too large, and the color with its cool light and warm shadows gives an otherworldly ominous glow.

- MSB You told me once that the female figure in *Blaze* represents Snow White. There's an innocence in her child-like nudity—but something in her face strikes me as more adult, sinister, perhaps even a little demented. Do you see this painting as a scene with a place in the traditional Snow White story?

- JL It's an elaboration on the Snow White story. Fairy tales never tell us the specifics of the daughters, mothers, sons, and woodsmen who act out the

scenes: they are *types* more than real believable people. This Snow White, also known as Blaze, is in the process of realizing the power of her maturing body. She is thinking to herself how that fire is warming her lower extremities—she is surprised and a little possessed.

- MSB This, I think, may be a deeply dumb question, as you may well have already answered it in the image. But for this more verbally oriented interlocutor, can you say in words how your Blaze relates to the traditional figure of Snow White?

- JL My girl is like Snow White because she is on the cusp of puberty. In the original fairy tale she is a victim. She is stalked and poisoned by her stepmother, and the only way she can be brought back to life is by a kiss from the prince. My Snow White is seen in the painting in an autoerotic moment—

- MSB And so won't be needing any kiss from a prince, I reckon.

You said she seemed *possessed*. Now that's an interesting word. Your Blaze courts possession through firelight, a process formalized in Haiti, for example, by people looking to precipitate a visit from a spirit by staring into a candle flame. A number of your images, especially *Sundown* and *Woman with Beautiful Hair*, do remind me of a Haitian style often assumed to be surrealistic, but which literally represents the experience of trance and dream. Possession and artistic inspiration can come so close in this sort of context as to be two terms for the same thing.

- JL I have an interest in Vodou; I love the idea that you have multiple spirits to advise you on specific

U MSB Well, yeah, I might be, and it might also be that
D you don't want to talk about that. It does strike me,
I though, that you came of age, artistically and in other
T ways, at a time and place that was saturated with a
H passion for radical social change, a huge optimism,
and eventually huge disappointments, too. Were you
conscious of the effect of that atmosphere on your
L work and its purposes, at the time or later on?
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JL Throughout the '60s in San Francisco, there was
an atmosphere of experimentation: lifestyle,
consciousness, politics, and sex were all up for
new definitions. One took a stand on the issues and
expressed one's views. During an anti-Vietnam War
protest in Berkeley, the tear gas was so intense it
melted the polka dots of my dress.

MSB Just the polka dots? How very strange.

JL Many art students formed rock bands playing at
the Fillmore with photographs from the media
and psychedelic light projected onstage. My
friends included the comic-book and poster artists
S. Clay Wilson, Robert Crumb, and the director
Terry Zwigoff.

MSB Do you see a connection between your work and
theirs? To me it's not visually obvious, but that doesn't
mean it's not there.

JL We do share an interest in narrative. In the past
there was a dismissive attitude toward narrative
work and work that used bright color: it was seen
as regional and not serious by the New York art
world. The comic-book artists were making work
that completely bypassed the art world, which
they saw as phony and pretentious. They were a
very disciplined group with a high regard for craft
and draftsmanship.

MSB How old were you at the time of the notorious *Bad
Painting* exhibition? And how did you get involved
with that show?

JL I was 37 years old, and I was invited to exhibit
by the curator, Marcia Tucker. I had met her in
California and New York on several occasions
and we all knew about her on the West Coast,
as she was seen as someone with an open mind,
very adventurous in her take on art. At the time
she was making an effort to break the strangle-
hold the New York art world establishment had
on what was seen as art. Several of my California
peers were included in that exhibition, like Charles
Garabedian, Jim Albertson, and Joan Brown, as well
as New York-based artists who were moving away
from the cooler, New York-oriented work.

MSB You moved to New York in 1980, not the most hospi-
table time for figurative artists here. What has it been
like persevering with your attitude toward figuration
on the East Coast?

JL I decided to move to New York after the *Bad
Painting* show. I could see that ideas about art
were beginning to be more inclusive in New York
and that I might have the opportunity to exhibit
my work here. I would not say there is any lack of
acceptance of figuration in New York these days.

MSB Any other interaction with the classic phenomena of
the California '60s?

JL I did have my share of drug-induced altered states,
and these experiences had a value, allowing me
to feel the vitality of my own imagination. At the
same time, I was a working artist and the mother
of a young child. These altered-state experiences
were hard to integrate into any kind of homey,
domestic, PTA-meeting, child-rearing reality.

I do think the time and place that I grew up have
had an effect on my work. The characteristic that
describes the beatniks, the hippies, and the femi-
nists is the search for a non-hierarchical way of
participating in the world—to be taken for who
you are, not what you own. California has histori-
cally been the seedbed for alternative begin-
nings, generated by those moving out of the East
and Midwest communities. There is this prejudi-
cial attitude in California that sees people in the
East as more invested in the status quo and more
concerned with credentials.

MSB As a Southerner I am pleased to say, My dog ain't in
this fight.

JL Very funny. I wanted my work to have populist
appeal—that is, to be accessible to anyone who is
willing to look and respond. My politics led me in
the direction of figuration and narrative art.

MSB How so? Would you say any of your paintings are
overtly political?

JL Much of the work I did in the '70s is overtly femi-
nist, like the mermaid devouring the sailor. I have
always had an interest in the work of Angela Carter,
especially her book *The Bloody Chamber*. Those
stories retell some traditional fairy tales and are
more sexual and Freudian than the originals; the
women reign and triumph. As it turns out, most
of the figures in my paintings are self-possessed,
back-talking gals.

MSB I notice the Eden in which the women in the latest
show are rowing doesn't seem to have any men in it,
and the women don't appear to miss them. But are
these women speaking? That implication seems to be
there. Tell me more about implied speech and story-
telling in these images.

JL I never thought of the figures as literally speaking.
And by the way, I love the possibility of painting a
picture of women missing men! When I say back-
talking women, I mean there is an attitude expressed
in the body language or the color of the skin or
garments that shows a strength and defiance.

MSB We've been drifting toward this topic off and on. That
hypnotist you mentioned a while back: I've heard that
somebody directed you in what is sometimes called
"lucid dreaming." What was that like?

JL In the early '70s I went to a lecture on dream theory
at the local Buddhist temple, where the lecturer
talked about the importance of dreams in various
tribal cultures. For the next six years I had weekly
visits with this man. I would come in with a dream
that I would tell. He would put me in a trance and I

issues, like how to handle your adolescent son or how to start a business.

- MSB There's something in common there with the sort of direction you may get from dreams, and from the experience of lucid dreaming.
- JL It makes sense that you could get some good advice from the appropriate "spirits"—this process reminds me of my hypnotist helping me get past fears and facilitating a communication with the characters in my dreams. The notion that everyone already knows what they need to know to be wise and content, that all you need to do is to be able to access this wisdom, is very appealing.

Possession is a good term for artistic inspiration. You are not entirely in control: you are channeling something beyond your control.

- MSB By the way, do you have any interest in chaos theory?
- JL What is chaos theory?

- MSB It includes the butterfly effect: a butterfly flaps its wings in China and the ultimate consequence is tornadoes in Kansas. Chaos theory tries to explain the mathematical rules that govern turbulence and fractal growth, as in leaves, coastlines, crystals. . . . It embraces Mandelbrot sets, which are, for better or worse, responsible for paisley.

- JL I didn't know paisley had such cosmic origins.
- MSB Yes. It's distressing in a way. Perhaps we had best return to the question of your artistic forebears.

- JL My fathers would be more like David Park, Bob Thompson. These artists have been interested in negotiating the line between figuration and abstraction going back to the late '50s and before. My artistic mothers would be Remedios Varo and Toyen, both of whom made images of women as powerful and dominating and sexy.

- MSB So there are two generations of your ancestry. What about your descendants? Do you see your artistic DNA being passed on anywhere down the line?

- JL Painters share in a long and complex tradition going back to the caves, which is both a pleasure and a burden. It's a pleasure to see a Roman fresco of rabbits in a field and recognize the technical mastery and think, I am one of these craftsmen. This tradition is also a burden, because all painting is seen against a backdrop of this history. The challenge is to use what has been cultivated without being seen only in terms of historic style.

At the moment, I see a number of younger artists thinking about issues I think about: how to make a painting read with power and immediacy the way the great abstract paintings do, and at the same time not give up the pleasure of making figurative story-telling images.

- MSB Your career as a painter has been both precocious and extremely durable. What led you to start painting at the age of 14? Were there any particular visual artists that especially drew you at that early stage?

- JL At a very young age I was interested in copying pictures of snakes from the encyclopedia and in learning how to draw in perspective. When I was old

enough to go to the Los Angeles County Museum on my own, I discovered Albert Pinkham Ryder, the nineteenth-century American mystical/mythical painter. I love his simplification of the image to abstract shapes. The painting at LACMA is called *Moonlit Cove*, and it has four or five shapes. The values of the painting are on the dark side, so you need to spend time with it to see the shape of the ship on the water, the cliffs, and the moon. It has a riveting and dramatic gestalt and an emotional intensity, and a very specific sense of light.

I started seriously thinking of myself as an artist in high school, growing up in the beatnik days in Los Angeles and taking drawing classes at the Art Center school on Saturdays. My family always encouraged forms of self-expression, though music was more their art form. My grandmother had gone to music school, and my aunt had a radio program in the late '40s called "Platters from Patty." She was into what was known as Progressive Jazz.

My boyfriend's sister was married to a poet, and they used to invite us along to poetry readings in Malibu. We were about 15 and we occupied a kind of mascot role, reading our favorite poems like *The Waste Land* in between the main acts. The artist Wallace Berman and his wife, Shirley, were usually present at these readings—he was very charismatic and made a big impression on me. I think it was the permissive atmosphere and the agreement that art was an all-important undertaking that at the time provided a social context.

- MSB That sounds a little wistful. Do you think art can still provide a social context now, in the twenty-first century? Your own or other people's art?

- JL I definitely think art creates a social context, at least in my tiny world. The social context that I experienced in beatnik Malibu was that as a young person I was regarded with interest and as an equal by older artists and poets.

I view art with friends and have extended conversations about particular artists all the time—but this might just be shoptalk. You might be thinking of how the art functions in the world.



would continue the "dreaming." I remember things like being told by a spider to beware of enchantment. I remember looking in a giant book and being terrified because my entire future was written in it, including the day of my death. There were often two women characters, one with pigtails and a red gingham dress, and a "bad girl" type with dyed black hair and a black garter belt. They were always trying to accomplish tasks, like building a raft to get off an island.

MSB I've seen women like these two in your work. Six years is a long time. How did this directed dreaming affect your painting?

JL The "lucid dreaming" technique is parallel in many ways to painting.

MSB To your painting, anyway. I feel like that may be a quality that sets you apart from a lot of other artists.

JL I try in my work not to be too rational—just to let the process unfold. I have often heard writers talk about the characters in their fictional work telling the author what they want, and that always struck me as a very similar process.

MSB Yes. It's true that fiction writers have to stop projecting character and story out of their intellect and just start letting it happen, so to speak. It's one way of thinking of inspiration, which in some cultures is understood, quite literally, as the direct action of wandering spirits on the mind and body.

JL In my dream with the island, the two women had a hard time cooperating in the building of the raft. The therapist made suggestions in the lucid dream state, like, Ask her if she would feel more comfortable with a larger hammer. This kind of encouragement of direct action in the dream helped me get the women off the island. What I like about this process of lucid dreaming is the use of metaphorical language that bypasses the intellect. The process gave me a lot of confidence in my intuition and imagination. Because I work spontaneously as a painter, I need strong intuitive responses.

MSB I once heard you say, with regard to your work, I feel everything in my body first. What's that like for you, and where does it go from there?

JL Painting is a physical act, and because I like to work large, it often involves my whole body. I trust my body more than my head—that is, the response of my hand is sometimes ahead of my brain. And I want the viewer to respond physically first.

I start my work by putting down color and then reading into this gesture, finding the image in the process. I do not consciously know the meaning of the image, either beforehand or afterward.

MSB With this in mind, I'd like to get your reaction to a passage from an essay by Mary Marchand called "Values Made Flesh." It's a literary essay about the author Edith Wharton, but I'm struck by a resonance in what you say about the physicality of your painting with what Marchand writes here:

"I want to suggest that the phrase 'aesthetic emotions' held special significance for Wharton, both

in light of William James's provocative theory of the physical basis of emotions, but more importantly, in light of theories advanced by the art connoisseurs Bernard Berenson and Vernon Lee, both close friends of Wharton and both in turn influenced by James's theory. In their various accounts, aesthetics becomes something experienced through and by the body; art changes humans by touching and modifying the body. . . . James's well-known formulation in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) turns our conviction regarding the causal order of events on its head: While intuition tells us we cry because we're sad, we hit because we're angry, James argues that 'The more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike.' In short, 'emotion follows upon the bodily expression.' His theory of emotions builds on his account of how objects mobilize and modify the human body, which emerges from James's writings as something exquisitely sensitive, alive, and attuned: 'objects do excite bodily changes. . . so indefinitely numerous and subtle that the entire organism may be called a sounding-board, which every change of consciousness, however slight, may make reverberate.' 'A purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity,' James concludes."

JL I would love to read that essay. I get my encouragement for my ideas a little closer to home, by monitoring my own reactions to art. I knew about Jackson Pollock for years before I ever saw his paintings in person. When I saw a major Pollock painting for the first time, I had a eureka moment. The experience of a 15-foot painting with its rhythmic pouring of paint was an example of one body speaking directly to another. The Abstract Expressionists were aware of painting's power to involve you in an immediate experience. The challenge for me is to keep that direct experience and represent recognizable imagery at the same time.

MSB Your paintings begin with an abstract image. How does that evolve into the figurative image that the viewer eventually sees?

JL When I start a painting, I am looking for the color that will express a particular light. Let's say black and yellow might make an otherworldly, nightmarish light, or blue and orange might remind you of light in a landscape near water. I paint fields of these colors for a while; the fields could look like the desert at night, the forest in the afternoon, or a moon. I envision these places inhabited by people or animals, or even by insects.

MSB I'd love for you to talk about these strategies as deployed in some particular painting.

JL *Plenty* started with the idea that I wanted to warm the viewer with several square feet of undulating yellow and orange. This shape became the gown of the large figure. I liked the idea that light and heat could come from a dress. Her yellow-orange body started to tilt, and that suggested the subject of the large figure leaning toward smaller figures. I wanted the viewer to share the point of view of the

smaller figures, so I began to develop the godmother figure as seen from below. The light that began to develop between the bright yellows and the cool gray-greens began to suggest a forest setting. The large heads represent a chorus of spirits.

I make gouache studies in this fashion until I have come up with an image that can be read in its totality. At that point I have internalized the image, or memorized it. Then I go to the larger canvas using oil paint. It is important for me to stay in the process of putting the paint down; the link to kinetic activity is all-important to me. I don't want to be in the situation of painting an image that I cooked up in my head—that would be too much like illustration.

MSB You're describing an interesting progression here: a pure sensory experience of color and warmth evolves into a figure, which then leaps (it seems like a leap to me) into being a godmother—a godmother! With all the implications for good or ill that that character has attached to it in fairy tale and folklore. *Plenty* has what I would call a very ambivalent affect. Is the godmother's relationship with the smaller figures nurturing or sinister—or can it be both at the same time?

JL The process I am describing has a relation to a Rorschach test, where the subject is asked to read into the ink blotches and in doing so reveals her own psychology. I have certain characters who live in my inner world, who are particular to my experience. You might not see a godmother in a yellow swath of paint, but I would recognize her right

away. And I hope the godmother's relationship with the smaller figures is both nurturing *and* sinister.

MSB I think you may in fact be interested in chaos theory: there is something very similar to the elaboration of an image the way you just described it. But never mind. The title of your last show was *Rowing in Eden*. When I look at your work I don't automatically think "Emily Dickinson": it seems far more vibrant, energetic, and uninhibited than the conventional image of Dickinson (which is, however, a very partial image and perhaps almost entirely false). And yet:

Wild Nights—Wild Nights!
Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile—the Winds—
To a Heart in port—
Done with the Compass—
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor—Tonight—
In Thee!

Of course we do understand better, these days, what tremendous turbulence is contained in Dickinson's outward conventionality and her personal reclusiveness. A lot of those repressed forces seem to leap



PLenty, 2003, oil on linen, 60 × 75"



from the relatively monochromatic Dickinsonian sensibility into the furious colors of your canvases. I see some obvious resonances between this particular poem and your latest show, but I wonder if you'd talk about the less obvious ones.

- JL The line "Rowing in Eden" evokes an accessible paradise. You're in paradise, but it's not all in your head—you are rowing. Your body is engaged in a repeated motion. That title for my show put the various images in a lightly held context. I am not an expert on Dickinson, but I experience this poem as very sexy, but unrequited, and to my ear there is a slight nod to death in the last three lines.

MSB I think that reading hits it bang in the center.

- JL I am interested in the dynamic between repression and abandon. In my fantasies I am a wild woman of nature, and in reality I am the daughter of American Protestants, people who came from Scotland to California three generations ago, starting out as welders and blacksmiths, living in the high desert towns of Indio and Newhall, where William S. Hart had his homestead—the site of many early westerns. My mother's and aunts' and uncles' generation all had an interest in being outdoors as much as possible—in fact, in all the family portraits they are wearing bathing suits, except for my grandmother, who was from Kansas and considered herself more cultivated than the California Scots.

This heathen crew was dedicated to bodybuilding, swimming, hunting, fishing, and drinking. My parents belonged to a ski club whose emblem had a candle burning at both ends. As a youngster I spent many an afternoon at Muscle Beach in Santa

Monica, taking in all the buff bodies performing handstands and lifting scantily clad women up on one hand. I guess this explains the heathens. But I spent much of my childhood with my grandmother, who was raised by Bible-reading, church-going Baptists, so I must have inherited some of the family's psychic conflicts.

MSB Wild Nights indeed! That does sound like an inverted version of Emily Dickinson's inner tensions. Do you think there's a way, in art or in life, to synthesize those extremes?

- JL This is not an easy question. I don't think I am looking for any kind of balance between the two. In life, it seems as though my fears and inhibitions are endless. I am always trying to get to the bottom of what might be making me self-conscious. In a way I am looking for a state of grace; maybe that is a kind of balance. In art-making every now and then you are "in the zone," and the work flows out, but that is a hard-won state.

MSB I think it would be stupid to ask how you win that state, but I can't resist.

- JL It has various degrees of intensity. Just the sunlight beaming through the skylights in the morning pulls me out of bed and into my painting clothes. I am a believer in work and discipline. Entering my studio and brushing paint down certainly gives me a better chance of focusing into this zone. Light and color are my home base and inspirational core. The instant I paint violet next to green or yellow next to blue, I am on my way.