

## WHITEHOT MAGAZINE

**Swallowtail: Andrea Marie Breiling at Almine Rech**

By Clare Gemima, May 2023



Installation of Swallowtail. Image courtesy of Almine Rech.

With 16 flower bouquets addressed to Andrea Marie Breiling sitting on Almine Rech's floor, it was obvious the previous night's opening of Swallowtail, her third solo-show with the gallery, was nothing less than a deserved night of chaotic celebration for the artist's magnificent new body of paintings. Based on a particularly good looking subspecies of butterfly, widely known for its intricate patterns and funky wing shapes, Breiling has filled the entire gallery with her new body of striking, large-scale spray paintings, wrapped with ferocious, but somehow still soft, spiraling marks which, through their intense colorways, have produced a historically conscious, and collisional dynamism that screams from each and every wall in the gallery.

I was lucky enough to spend some time interviewing Breiling about her painting process, ask her more pointed questions about certain research areas, and learn more about Swallowtail's muses.

**Clare Gemima:** Andrea! A massive congratulations on Swallowtail. These paintings quite literally stop you in your tracks, and sweep you off your feet. I have not been able to stop thinking about your relationship with them since meeting you. Based on their larger than life scale, maximized compositions, and layers upon layers of spray paint, how has the swallowtail butterfly, in all of its uniqueness, specifically fueled this new body of work?

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**Andrea Marie Breiling:** Well, it happened pretty organically. My partner and I were in New Haven for the weekend, and visited the Yale University Museum of Art. It really was so much more spectacular than I anticipated it being. And, what I loved most was how much painting they had in their collection. It was wonderful. The Jackson Pollocks however, really stood out to me because of their uniqueness in scale compared to the other paintings in the museum. I decided at that moment that I wanted to challenge myself, and see if I could stretch my abilities and skill set to tackle canvases much longer and skinnier than I'd ever worked with before. Later on, once these huge new canvases started arriving at my studio, I was really overwhelmed by them. It was intimidating and I really had to wrap my mind around how I might create something dynamic at such a scale. I felt the push to quickly figure out smaller line work and layering techniques. Around that same time my partner had a nature documentary on to keep our two cats entertained...this particular show was dedicated to butterflies, and had some amazing close-ups of their wing patterns. I realized how color, texture, and patterns don't need a specific size or space. Rather, the thing that stood out to me was their wings' symmetry. I started studying them: buying books, watching documentaries on YouTube, etc, and used the nature of swallowtail's wings themselves to help guide me in making these works. Swallowtail butterflies were critically important to the inspiration of the show, even though they are only seen through loose representation.

**Clare Gemima:** There's such a degree of interiority to these pieces, and I think it's so seductive for your audience. It also highlights the dilution of any representation through their focal, and hugely satisfying abstraction. It makes it harder to identify who, what, and where we are looking. Have you converted the gallery into a richly painted garden of butterflies, or have you trapped your viewers inside the pigments of their wings?

**Andrea Marie Breiling:** Hmmmm such a beautiful question. I suppose that's really up to each viewer's discretion and imagination. I think each painting operates independently and differently, but at the same time they all need each other to function as a whole. Regardless of whether one sees the show as a garden of butterflies, or feels trapped by their wings, I hope in some way or another viewers can experience a moment of transcendence at some point, and maybe even forget they're looking at a painting entirely.

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**Clare Gemima:** I remember thinking about this question more specifically while looking at your horizontal works. Their orientation made me curious about your own, human wingspan. How do you physically approach these paintings?

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**Andrea Marie Breiling:** I typically start working on each piece with the canvas standing straight up in my studio. But to your point, I often have to twist and turn the paintings to change up their orientation in order to physically reach certain areas of the work. As I'm sure you can imagine, all that lifting and turning can be very taxing and laborious. As far as starting, I just get to it and start painting. I've found that if I have too much of a plan in advance, it takes the joy of discovery away from me, and I lose that sense of adventure and exploration in real time. I love learning and discovering new things while I work, so I prefer to just dive right in and see where it leads me.

**Clare Gemima:** If your paintings in Swallowtail are now butterflies, and Jackson Pollock began as your caterpillar, which female painter embodied your chrysalis?

**Andrea Marie Breiling:** Wow, this is an incredibly thought provoking question, but I'm not sure I have a concrete answer. Not to undermine female painters in any way, but I think I'd want any 'gender', or perhaps 'genderless' interpretation of the paintings to embody and present a spirit of powerful transcendence instead.

**Clare Gemima:** What is the hardest aspect of making all of these works entirely with spray paint, and will you continue to do so?

**Andrea Marie Breiling:** The hardest aspect is the fumes. The paint fumes are very toxic and due to that, I have to be strategic about when I can work on them, and for how long I can paint at any given time, and so on. For instance, if it's windy or really gusty it's hard to work because I really need to have my studio's garage bay door wide-open to let the fumes out. I've got a couple of huge fans, an HVAC system with filters, and I always wear a respirator, but even still it can be rough. I don't see myself working with spray paint forever, although I don't have any immediate plans to change it up just yet. I really hope a new medium finds its way to me. This evolution is organic - it's not something that I can't force, so we will see.

**Clare Gemima:** How do you title your works, and at which stage in your process does this happen?

**Andrea Marie Breiling:** Titling my works is such an important process. It usually doesn't happen until I've actually finished the piece, and taken a breather to sit down and reflect on it. At that stage, the work itself has really crystallized and its title is basically the ribbon - for lack of better analogy - that wraps it all up in a bow. While I'm working, I'll often play music and specific songs on repeat. I usually take a mental note to title a work after a particular song to help log a memory for me, so the works become journals of my lifetime, space, and sound. That said, some pieces will get titled through conversation about the work with co-workers, or they'll be named after the inspiration of the work itself.

**Clare Gemima:** What was it that made you choose to name the show's eponymous painting, and how does it intend to anchor the other paintings in the show?

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**Andrea Marie Breiling:** Quite simply, Swallowtail was the first painting I made for this show. It really was the anchor which helped tell the story, and guide the rest of the work, from its colors, various line values, and the repetition of various textures - just to name a few of its pioneering qualities. This piece essentially became the show's muse.

**Authors note:**

*Congratulations again for a stunning showcase Andrea. It was an absolute treat to get to walk through your show with you. Swallowtail runs until June 10, 2023. For more information on the show, please visit Almine Reich.*