

Lorna Ritz

Lorna Ritz: Paintings

07.11.2025 – 08.16.2025

YveYANG will soothe the heat of downtown Manhattan this summer with abstract expressionist views of rural Massachusetts, courtesy of Lorna Ritz, whose debut New York solo exhibition *Lorna Ritz: Paintings* opens July 11.

Though long celebrated by institutions and United States collectors, this marks Ritz's first major gallery show in New York—a milestone that feels both long overdue and perfectly timed. The exhibition features never-before-seen paintings spanning two decades, all created in her studio barn overlooking the mountains, trees, and wide-open fields of bucolic Western Massachusetts. There, Ritz has developed a rigorous yet intuitive painting practice—one rooted in deep seeing, muscular color, and uncompromising labor.

"I paint the light that the relationships of color finds, specific to the time of day, or the season, that breathes life into the painting," Ritz said. "The view from my studio barn doesn't change, but it's never the same."

Ritz's work is neither plein air nor romantic abstraction—it is a radical formalism grounded in nature. Her paintings translate lived perception into fields of color that reject sentimentality, yet thrum with emotional charge. A canopy might dissolve into symphonic scribbles of white and red. Kinetic yellows press forward, while darkened underlayers hold memory and tension. Each pigment is custom-mixed, each surface labored over until the warm-cool harmony is exact. Only one color is ever used straight from the tube: cobalt blue—for the perfect sky.

"I love when one color, with all those layers, sits next to another color, with its own temperature range of warms and cools," Ritz said. "They pull apart from each other spatially... and yet simultaneously push back when in relation to newly placed colors. They make each other vibrate. Everything is in a constant state of motion. What the viewer thinks is coming forward, then pushes back at the same time. Where the colors sit in space creates the composition."

Fourth generation from Worcester, Massachusetts, and trained under James Gahagan—a Hans Hofmann student

whom PBS once called "one of the most skillful American colorists"—Ritz carries forward a lineage of postwar abstraction rarely granted to women of her generation. She has painted with total commitment for decades, largely outside the commercial art world—a path shared by many women artists of her generation, whose contributions are only now being recognized. Her work, though deeply rooted in tradition, resists nostalgia or decorative ease. It is urgent, electric, and often larger than life.

Though her canvases may appear gestural or loose, they are in fact the result of months of precise work. Ritz hand-builds and stretches her surfaces with drum-tight tension. Her drips are not accidents, but decisions. Nothing is casual. This is painting as a physical argument—deliberate, intimate, and fiercely alive.

"I always knew painting was hard and would take all of me to keep getting better. In my earlier work, I was trying too hard," she said. "Now there is so much more pleasure in the search, the wonder. Process has to be the root of it—not the finding, but in the seeking pleasure in how to handle oil paint anew each time. The paint finds the concept."

Her earliest encounters with painting began at the Worcester Art Museum as a child, where she felt a deep kinship with Monet, Pissarro, and Van Gogh. That sense of direct, sensory connection continues in her work today—not as imitation, but as kindred intensity.

With this exhibition, YveYANG invites the New York art world to reckon with a painter who has spent decades doing the real work—quietly, seriously, and with conviction.

Lorna Ritz (b. 1947, Worcester, USA) has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design, Brown University, the University of Minnesota, and Dartmouth College. She is a MacDowell Fellow and her work is held in the collections of the Cedars-Sinai Collection, the Aidron Duckworth Art Museum, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, the Anderson Museum of Contemporary Art, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, the Worcester Art Museum, and the Provincetown Art Museum.