



## Ingrid Calame

Other people spend their lives scrubbing out stains, but this Los Angeles painter maps their amorphous shapes in a quest to illumine the beauty within

By David Colman



Ingrid Calame in her Los Angeles studio. Above: From #231 Drawing (*Tracings up to the L.A. River Placed in the Clark Telescope Dome, Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff, AZ*), 2006, enamel paint on aluminum. See Resources.

The current rage for mingling the worlds of art and design may raise the eyebrows of those who are surprised to see tables and chairs—albeit ones with modernist pedigrees—for sale in the art world's hallowed halls. But the truth is that the boundary between the two disciplines has long been blurred. Well before vintage Prouvé and Nakashima pieces started cropping up in galleries, a generation of contemporary artists—including painters like Ghada Amer, Matthew Ritchie, and Beatriz Milhazes—had emerged, producing work that overlaps squarely, and to some extent happily, with the graphic-art style of the day. The same aesthetic seen in Chelsea galleries is decorating everything from fine china and linens to CD covers and design-boutique murals.

This crossover effect is particularly true of the artwork of Ingrid Calame, whose seemingly abstract paintings suggest, at first glance, a showroom backdrop for some cutting-edge Swiss furniture line: all Pollock splatters, but cleaned up with a Prada-like color sense. For this painter, however, an enormous amount of thought and planning goes into what can be taken for superficial loveliness. What's more, her source material is, well, something you'd avoid on the sidewalk.

Calame's mission doesn't end with the bright idea of painting splatters with the care and precision of realists like Harriet Schorr and Chuck Close (both of whom she once worked for as a studio assistant). The picturesque shapes that accrue and collide in her work are, in fact, taken from painstaking tracings that Calame makes of stains.

Yes, stains. It all started when she was studying at the California Institute of the Arts in the mid-1990s—the epicenter of theory-driven art—and found herself drawn to the then-unfashionable medium >



# JAMES COHAN GALLERY



Clockwise from top: #181 Working Drawing, 2005. Calame (in tan) and crew mapping skid marks at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. b-b-b, rr-gR-UF1, b-b-b, 1999. From #238 Drawing (Tracings up to the L.A. River Placed in the Clark Telescope Dome, Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff, AZ), 2006. See Resources.

82 ELLEDECOR.COM

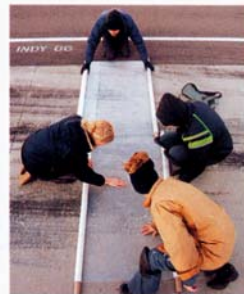


of painting. "It was very talk-heavy back then," she recalls. "There wasn't much interest in abstraction." Discontented with a series of works she had done, Calame looked down and saw the blobby, streaky drippings on the studio floor and thought, Maybe I'll paint them instead. A synthesis was born, one that merges the found-object art movement that delights in what other people deride as junk, and the coolly superficial surfaces of Op art. "I was always interested in trash, even as an undergraduate," says the Los Angeles-based Calame, who grew up in Ardsley, New York, and is now expecting her first child.

After that initial attraction to stains, it wasn't long before she was out on the sidewalks outlining all manner of shapes onto translucent Mylar, a technique she still follows. Back in the studio, she cuts out the forms and arranges them to her liking, in what she calls a constellation. She then creates a final tracing of the patterns, which she transfers onto an aluminum panel as the underdrawing for a painting.

Copying stains allows her to remove from the process the instrument of her body—the Pollock-style painter-as-slingshot. "The mark that an action painter makes has to do with expression, but this is different," she explains. "They look like abstract paintings, but they're really representational." And the fact that they represent, in effect, dross (maybe some of it even yours) makes their abstraction cuttngly concrete.

With her method of controlling shapes and outcomes rather than "intuitively" holding a paintbrush, Calame acts more like a director than a painter, a job description that has come in handy as her works have grown in size. They routinely spread across gallery walls and floors, and sometimes require teams of people to get the job done. One current project has her duplicating skid marks at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for a solo show at the Indianapolis Museum of Art next November. Another epic work involved a series of installations appearing at the



New York Stock Exchange, the Methodist church in her hometown, and Arizona's Lowell Observatory.

This last setting makes a neat link to Calame's childhood dream of drawing a map of the universe. "But I never knew where to start," she recalls. Now, she's making maps of what was instead of what is. They won't help you find your way, but they should help make the spot where you're standing seem a little more interesting. ■

