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WATER*

Sunny Spaces, Seaside Style

A Deep Dive

Sarah Lutz traces the trajectory of her colorful, abstract artwork from motherhood to marine life. BY MARNI ELYSE KATZ

Sarah Lutz has been painting a shape she calls a “morula” (a mass of cells that occurs in the early development of an embryo) for years. It first appeared in her work when she conceived her daughter in the late 1990s—an outgrowth, she says, of poring over pregnancy books.

The pregnancy went smoothly, but with her first post-partum exhibition came a career bump.

Lutz, who earned a B.A. from Skidmore College and an M.F.A. from American University, was called out by gallery-goers for unknowingly borrowing forms from artist Terry Winters, who had created a



TOP: *Billow* (2014), 30"H x 24"W, oil and mixed media on linen. **BOTTOM:** *Trestle* (2019), 10"H x 8"W, oil and spray paint on panel.

Morula series in the early 1980s. She describes it as an “art world kick in the ass,” as well as a learning experience, saying, “It was a lesson in knowing your art history.” Eventually, Lutz made peace with it. “These

biomorphic shapes came from my immersion in pregnancy,” she says. “I literally carried these cells.”

Those early morulae—solitary forms sitting on a shelf that she likens to self-portraits or still lifes—

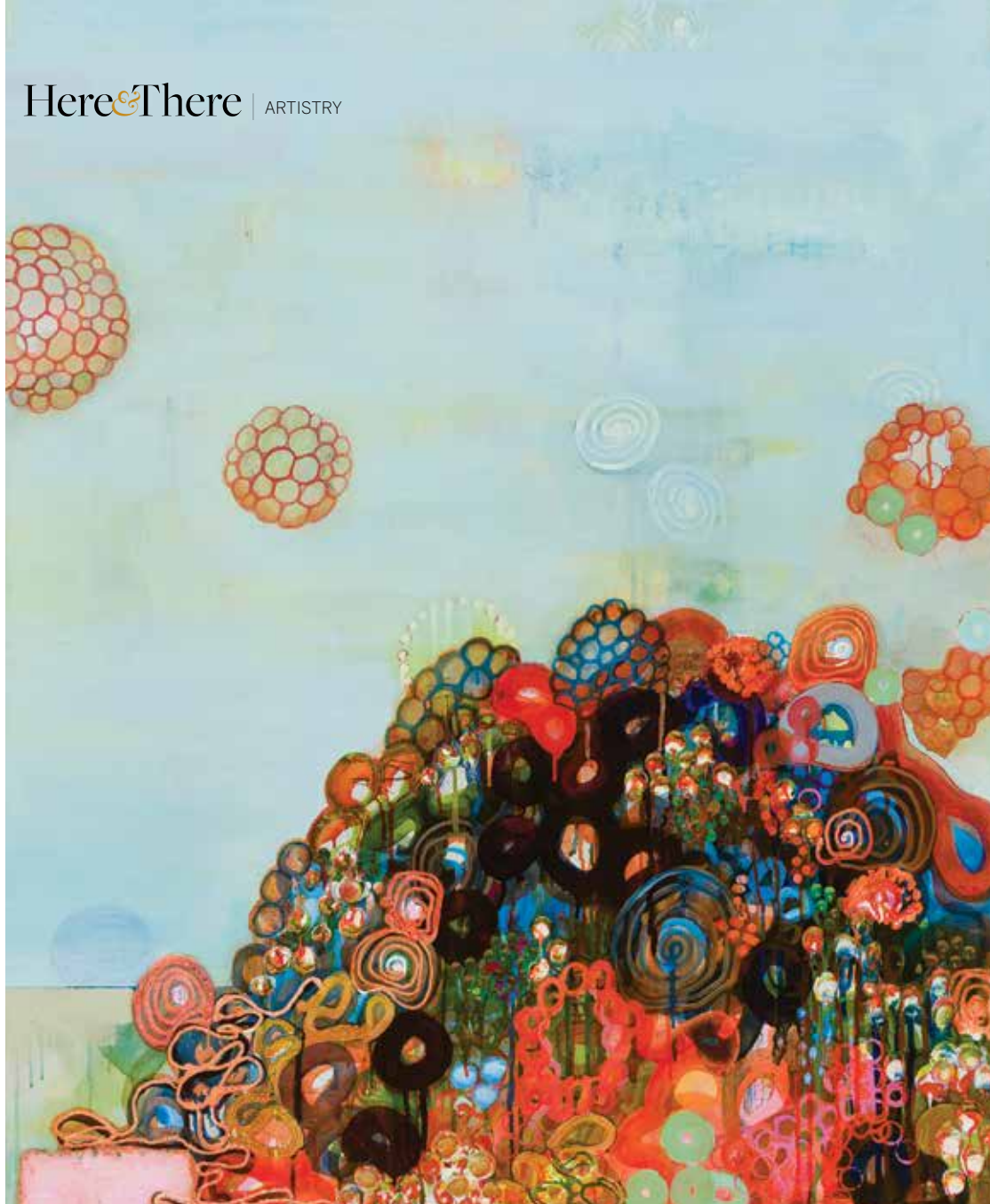
CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *Sidewalk VI* (2019), 10"H x 8"W, oil and spray paint on panel; *Sluiceway* (2016), 48"H x 48"W, oil and mixed media on canvas; the artist in her studio; *Confetti* (2018), 40"H x 30"W, oil on linen.



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have morphed from simple reproductive symbols into fantastical underwater imagery. She refers to the shapes as versatile “characters” that take on different functions and personalities. “They can be very physical, sitting down to ground a painting, or more ethereal, as wispy floaty things,” she says.





LEFT: *Concoction (Scarlet)* (2014), 40"H x 30"W, oil and mixed media on linen.

BELOW: *Brinjal* (2018), 14"H x 11"W, oil and spray paint on panel.

Lutz credits her time in Truro, where she has spent every summer painting since age sixteen, as hugely influential. Although her studio windows look to grassy dunes and blue skies, she's often perched on her deck staring at Cape Cod Bay, thinking about the way organisms accumulate and separate, and how creatures exist beneath the water and sand.

Her ruminations inevitably infiltrate her paintings. "There are things that exist under the sea that you couldn't make up in your wildest dreams," she says.

Pointing to a spare top portion of

a painting in progress she muses, "I think this could be a sky, or maybe we're under water." Then she switches her focus to morulae congregating along the bottom of the canvas, which she plans to build up with layers of bruise-y red paint. "I love how light comes through the cracks of an underwater cavern, and then opens up," she says. "That's where my head is at right now, but we'll have to see what will happen."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sarah Lutz is represented by The Schoolhouse Gallery, gallerieschoolhouse.com, and 10 Grand Press, 10grandpress.com. To see more of her work, visit sarah-lutz.com.

