



▲ Radio City Music Hall, 2017

All photographs of the art by Howard Lenz.

BY TONY GENGARELLY

**K**nown for her brightly lit, rainbow-colored transformations of architecture set against nighttime skies filled with a variety of astronomical phenomena, Jessica (Jessy) Park has reached yet another plateau with her art. Park's tightly rendered, multicolored grids that depict bridges or alter the facades of buildings have, in some of her more recent work, expanded

into diffuse patterns of color embracing stunning depth and volume.

With renditions such as *Radio City Music Hall*, 2017, Park's mastery of perceptual space and architectural intricacy, now fully evident, expresses the visionary joy the artist finds in such monumental structures. Injecting particular details drawn from close observation of her subject as well as her

storehouse of favorite "enthusiasms," Park has charged a heightened naturalism with an exciting level of fantasy rarely seen before in her work.

An early indication of this trend can be found in the 2008 *Happy New Year in Times Square*. Here, the colors accentuate the architecture's upward thrust, while a successful recession into the background is achieved with

alterations of light and dark. This illustrates the artist's growing mastery of perceptual depth.

Through Park's eyes, the celebratory icon also becomes a combination of personal interests. The colored dots that punctuate the sky in the picture's upper right-hand corner are drawn from those on the light switch in her bedroom. Imaginary infusions, such as the tower with the great ball, suggest the marquee of an amusement park. Rather than a single structure, *Happy New Year Times Square* is a recognized location that has become actively engaged with the artist's imagination. This picture is one of the few that the artist has kept for herself.

Along with this movement into a different set of architectural configurations, Park's career has continued to accelerate. Furthermore, the accolades and support from her patrons (including family and friends) have been amplified by college programs such as the Jessica Park Project at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) as well as her connections to galleries and museums.

The New York studio/gallery Pure Vision Arts has shown and marketed much of Park's output over the last 10–15 years. Publications have augmented Clara Park's ground-breaking books about her exceptional daughter. MCLA has published two volumes on the artist. (See *Folk Art Messenger*, Spring 2008; Spring/Summer 2013). Park's art also has been reviewed and discussed in the pages of *Raw Vision* (Summer 2016) and over the internet (on-line blog *Brut Force*). Currently, Park is a subject for a forthcoming book that explores the art education and career trajectories for artists on the autism spectrum.

Since 2008, Park's work has been featured in a number of university exhibitions, including ones at Endicott College, Eastern Michigan University, Wheaton College, Hobart-William

Smith, Lesley University, along with several showings at MCLA Gallery 51 in North Adams, Mass., and the Good Purpose Gallery in Lee, Mass. Two Vermont exhibitions of the artist's work—one at the Brattleboro Museum

World Transformed: The Art of Jessica Park," provided me (as guest curator) with the opportunity to study 30 exceptional Park paintings, along with many of the preparatory drawings. A pattern of creation emerged that the artist had been practicing for years.

The graphic versions revealed how Park abstracted her principal subject (building or bridge) from the original drawing. These drawings had been completed with her usual deft and accurate draftsmanship and signed as completed works of art.

First, she enlarged her drawing, then straightened its lines with the aid of a light table and ruler. Small details were removed during the process. This altered rendition was then transferred, once more via the light table, to the support she would use for her acrylic painting. Applying one carefully mixed color at a time, she filled in the modified architectural framework with her rainbow palette, reintroducing details as she completed the transformation of her subject. This composition of line and color was then embellished with surrounding elements, most usually skies with their astronomical features both accurate and imagined. The use of multiple lighting effects, such as day-lit subjects with nighttime skies, completed her dramatic alteration. The care and precision of every step revealed, once again, an artist of practiced brilliance.

Surrounded by extraordinary examples of Park's work, my

# JESSICA PARK NEW DIRECTION FOR AN ACCOMPLISHED ARTIST



▲ Happy New Year in Times Square, 2008

and Art Center in 2014, another currently at the Bennington Museum—have brought Park's work to another level of appreciation.

Organized by Chief Curator Mara Williams in partnership with the Jessica Park Project, the Brattleboro show, "A

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eyes finally settled on two unusual paintings: one done for a patron whose son was named Noah and the other for the artist herself who was developing a growing fascination with places of

imaginary interest. These two paintings held significant variations, much like the 2008 *Times Square* image also on display.

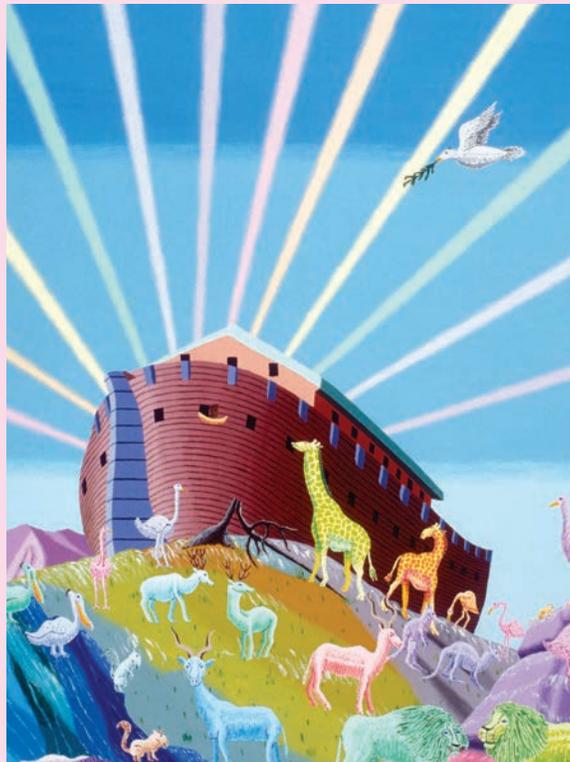
*The Noah's Ark with Diverging Rays*, 2002, is a transcendent image of light and color that celebrates the return of life after the deluge. In contrast to the far more sober drawing by Gustave Dore', upon which the work is based, Park placed the ark on a dry promontory surrounded by animals and birds—two by two. The brightly colored creatures reverberate with the ground under their feet, and the sky above beams layers of blue and multi-hued rays from the ark. Here was yet another example of Park's magic. She had transformed an original source through the manipulation of a number of elements combined with an exotic and energizing palette.

*The Noah's Ark* also represented a stylistic adventure for the artist. Instead of using a geometrically rigid template for her central structure, Park placed the ark near the horizon where it serves as a backdrop for the paired creatures that cover most of the foreground. Assemblages similar to this would appear again in the more personal and complex groupings of buildings that were to follow.

Another painting, *Epcot*, 2013, brought together the excitement of *Happy New Year in Times Square* and the freedom of manipulation evident in the *Ark*. Employing a variety of sources, Park selected a group of national pavilions to represent the Disney theme park. She drew them separately with her usual accuracy and then placed them together around the World Showcase Lagoon. The color palette is dispersed along the line of buildings, not concentrated in a centrally positioned grid. The scene is set at night, although brightly lit with color and strings of lights outlining the buildings' facades and roof lines. The artist has caught the moment when the lagoon is alive with celebration. Fountains and laser lights are turned on for the nightly "IllumiNations" show. Park has provided the palpable feeling of delight emanating from the scene. (This is another picture the artist has kept for herself.)

The current Bennington exhibition, "Enthusiasms: Personal Paintings by Jessica Park," (running through May 28) captures Park's trend toward more personal subject matter along with a discernible shift in style and presentation. Park's work has been

▼ *Noah's Ark with Diverging Rays*, 2002



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included in a number of the museum's exhibitions (most recently "Inward Adorings of the Mind," *Folk Art Messenger*, Spring/Summer 2016). The museum has already added three of her works to its collection, including a new painting from the Park family. The Parks have also loaned a number of the artist's creations currently on display, including some of her early works along with drawings and more informal pieces done for family and friends.

**B**ennington Museum curator Jamie Franklin says about two of Park's paintings—*Las Vegas*, 2016, and *Radio City Music Hall*:

"More recently Park has begun a series of paintings depicting public architectural

monuments, such as the Las Vegas strip and Radio City Music Hall, overlaid with a cacophony of invented elements. These works reflect Park's deeply personal interests, or "enthusiasms" as she calls them, in popular culture, astronomical phenomena, and prismatic lights and color, natural or man-made. . . ."

*Las Vegas* is Jessica Park's grand gesture toward an urban playground that has fascinated her for years. As Franklin points out, the painting is "one of Park's largest and most complex works to date." For this work "Park made nearly a dozen separate sketches of individual buildings and other design elements."

Again, the single focus has been moved aside for a series of brightly lit structures lining the bottom half of the picture. The color grid has been expanded once more, with block colors on the separate buildings providing a complementary balance. Rooflines, domes and spires reach into the night sky where a variety of logos, signs and action figures drawn from popular culture interface with prismatic extensions shooting out from below, including the McDonald's arch in the right background.

Park's fascination with upper-story configurations, especially domes and globes, is well recorded in earlier works: the *U.S. Capitol*, 2006 and *Taj Mahal*, 2009. Here she indulges this "enthusiasm" with special attention to the *Casino Royale* and its dome that command the center-right of the picture.

Rather than a primary image, we have a location, a "strip" where night lights and fantastic structures create a heart-stirring moment. Park has modified her earlier stylistic formula to grasp the intensity of place, to open the emotional content of her art.

Still, is this shift the beginning of a trend or just a personal interlude, an enjoyable diversion from most of Park's signature work over the past 30 years?

The 2017 *Radio City Music Hall*, displayed alongside *Las Vegas*, is in many ways the confirmation of a trend. The picture carries Park's hallmark architectural focus and precise delineation but we have a "city" of live entertainment, inside and outside the

structure. Architectural features are no longer contained in a tightly framed color grid. Rather, diffused blocks of color reinforce an extended geometry of forms. Her assemblage of components has also expanded with more exotic details, naturalistic conversions and images from popular culture.

Along with two of her other groundbreaking works, Jessica Park has kept *Las Vegas* and *Radio City* for herself. But, thanks to her growing reputation as an artist, they are fortunately on display to be shared with the world. 📧

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▲ Epcot, 2013.

**THE USE OF MULTIPLE LIGHTING EFFECTS, SUCH AS DAY-LIT SUBJECTS WITH NIGHTTIME SKIES, COMPLETED HER DRAMATIC ALTERATION. THE CARE AND PRECISION OF EVERY STEP REVEALED, ONCE AGAIN, AN ARTIST OF PRACTICED BRILLIANCE**

► Curator Jamie Franklin with Rachel Park and Jessica Park.



Photograph by Anthony Gengarelly.

▼ Las Vegas, 2016



\*\*For some examples of Jessica Park's work prior to 2004 see Emmanuelle Delmas-Glass, "Painting the World with a Rainbow," Folk Art Messenger, Fall/Winter, 2004. (folkart.org/mag/jessica-park)