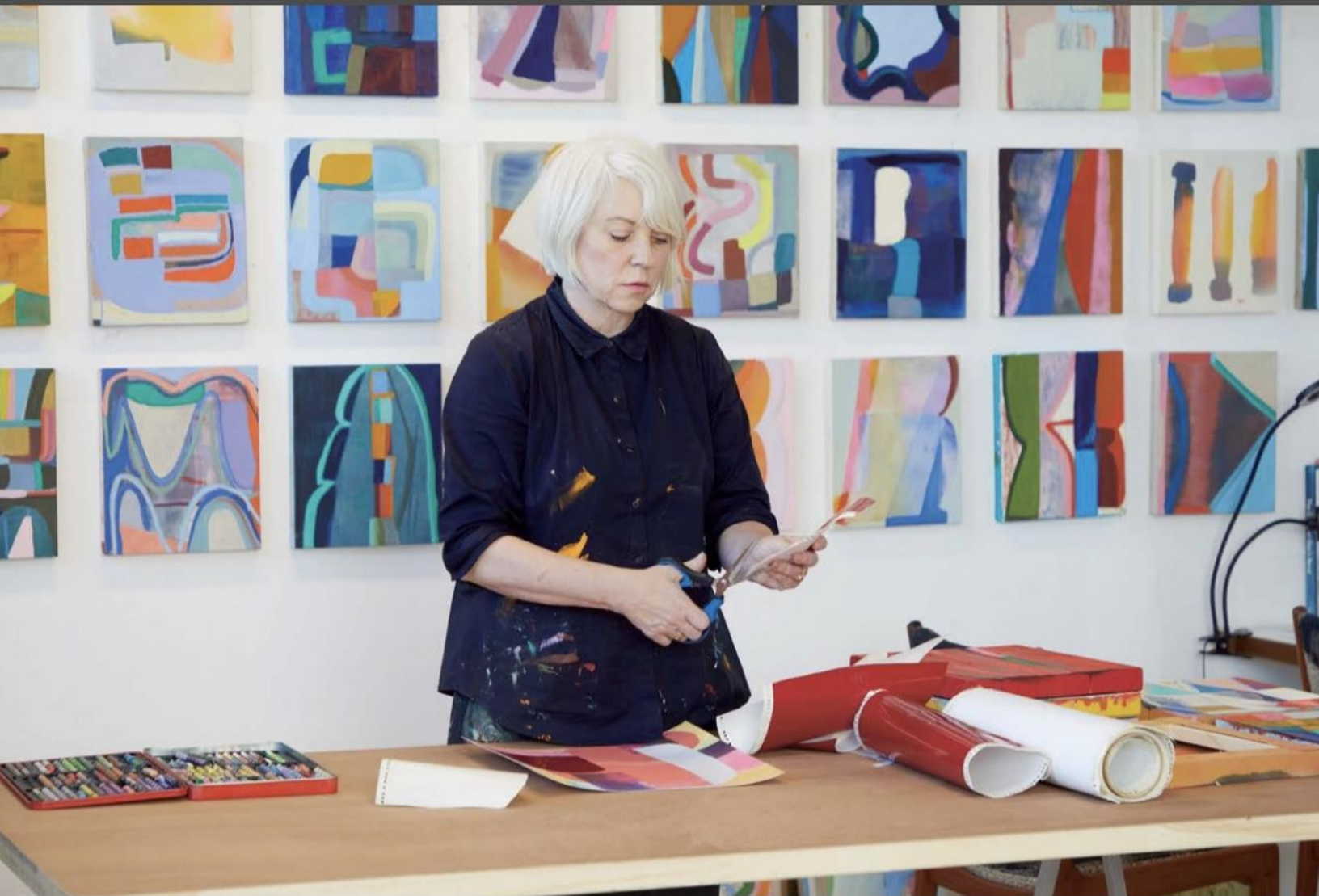


# COLOR THEORY

Artist Anna Kunz uses the power  
of pigment to spark emotion.

WRITTEN BY DEBORAH BISHOP  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CYNTHIA LYNN



**F**or Chicago-based painter Anna Kunz, color never sits still. “In a composition, it moves and vibrates,” she says. “It’s alive and engaging—the opposite of static.”

The artist, whose aesthetic forebears include such people as Robert Irwin and Josef Albers, learned about color’s emotive powers early in life. Her father worked at the Art Institute of Chicago, where a young Kunz often waited for him while parked in front of Mark Rothko’s shimmering *Untitled (Purple, White, and Red)*. “I observed how some people laughed, some got angry and others wept,” she recalls. “At 7 years old, I didn’t know color would be my lifelong pursuit—but I saw its potential to evoke a response.”

Today, Kunz—who divides her studio time between the Austin neighborhood and rural Michigan—is known for making viewers

rethink the hues they take for granted with works on paper, canvas and textiles. “I employ fairly simple geometric forms because I’m interested in pigments being perceived first,” she says, noting that color can affect everything from our heartbeats to our circulatory systems. She also explores how the perception of a particular hue depends on its surroundings. “Albers put it perfectly,” says Kunz, paraphrasing the 20<sup>th</sup>-century German American artist: “No one color is true—it is only determined by its relation to another color.”

In Kunz’s Austin studio, smaller works on paper are arrayed on countertops while larger canvases are spread on the floor. She moves between them via wooden planks in a kind of dance, painting to the sounds of experimental music. “My process is generative—I consider everything as part of a continuum,” says Kunz, who applies oils with a brush and acrylics with objects plucked from the domestic

realm—spatulas, hairbrushes, bits of fabric, curlers—as well as found items, like leaves. “And I use a lot of water, because I like to dissolve hard-edged boundaries,” she adds. Kunz builds a rich depth of color by layering multiple thin films of pigment. She works with only a couple of different hues in a given day, assigning each one its own specific task: “For example, I might want my red to feel submissive in one piece and more dominant in another,” the artist explains. “I use colors like characters to satisfy different formal problems.”

Kunz, who has an upcoming solo show at New York’s Alexander Berggruen gallery in May and a group show at Detroit’s Library Street Collective in July, knows a painting is finished when it starts to take on a life of its own and feels unexpected—“like a surprise,” she describes. “When I sense light emitting from the color, I feel I’ve created a kind of optimism, and that’s when it’s time to leave it alone.” ■



"All of my work is interrelated," artist Anna Kunz says of the bright paintings that fill her studio. Pieces range from the tiny *Palm Painting* (below) to oversize works in progress (left and bottom) to her "Adjacencies" series (opposite).

