

LISA ARIOTTI

BY IRENE BORNGRAEBER



THE EVOLUTION OF ORDER AND NATURE

Within the sleek, polished world of contemporary design, Lisa Ariotti insists that the instinct to create is undoubtedly primal. Through her installations, series of paintings on paper, she seeks to seamlessly balance the chaotic elements of the natural world with the often-impersonal structure of architectural works. For Ariotti, this intricate visual balance is more than just an aesthetic philosophy; it is also a drive to find the fulcrum of raw human inspiration and imposed scientific order.

Ariotti uses basic, natural materials (wood, paper, ink, and pigment) to create works inspired by the cave paintings at Lascaux and other early explorations of human mark-making. Fundamental building blocks, these symbols represent humanity's need to explore and produce, and their inherent imperfections make them all the more touching and relevant, especially in a society dominated by mechanized production.

"Humans have a need to create marks," says Ariotti. "In the human hand there is emotion, a true ability to communicate and to produce an idea."

Ariotti's desire to balance the raw natural power of human inspiration with an ordered approach to modern architecture results not only in a visual aesthetic that is both chaotic and restrained, but a working process that is equal parts vision and exploration. Ariotti's experiments with energy-filled form and color deftly capture the immeasurable and subtle variances of nature. For example, the *Autumnal* series focuses on more curvilinear shapes, while *Tempest* evokes more whipping, curling forms.

"The work always has a natural inspiration: from the forest, to the clouds, to a nebula in space. All of these elements bleed into the work," she says.

The principles of evolution also apply to her creative process: "I'm not interested in putting a direct thought onto paper; I'm interested in working with malleable materials and seeing what happens," she says. In a sense, the artist is trying to create her own flakes of nature, reinforcing the importance of the variability of the human artistic process, and the strengths that subtlety can bring to a piece. By using the delicate interplay between light and shadow and keeping color dominance to a minimum, Ariotti draws us in, to examine and interact with her work.

There is literally nothing separating the viewer from Ariotti's installations; you can reach out and touch the painted paper, see that some of the wooden mountings are not quite even, and that some decked edges still show. You can see that the work is human. Though Ariotti could easily make all her mountings hang at perfect 90-degree angles, or cut off that singular decked edge, she doesn't. She instead chooses to embrace

those details and incorporate them into a larger, ordered vision. By balancing the visual weight of each of these imperfections, she validates them as visual statements and reaffirms their importance in the creation of a unified work. This jostling of diverse visual elements creates a chaotic base through which the artist can arrange patterns, weaving complexity and respect for the unexpected into a focused statement. To Ariotti, there is balance and order within the disorder: "If there is enough chaos going on then the discrepancies even out, and balance in the end."

Ariotti's process is an evolution of its own. After having painted and applied color to large sheets of paper, Ariotti then proceeds to take her own work apart. She divides out the most compelling portions of the paintings—some as large as two feet; others as small as one square inch. Although these paintings could stand on their own, Ariotti dissects them to find the portions that best convey the energy of her chosen theme. Her original compositions are disembodied, broken down into elements that make the building blocks of a new work—the ultimate balance of creation and destruction.

After the "dissection," Ariotti mounts the chosen portions, and then begins the extended process of installation. None of her finished pieces are assembled in studio, but instead, laid out and hung directly on site in order to account for the unique attributes of each viewing space. With the aid of an architect friend, Bryant Botero, she deliberately places the pieces to establish a fluid relationship between the individual blocks, their environment, and the overall composition. Together, Ariotti and Botero build an environment from these handmade elements by rotating them, moving them around, and taking some of them away before deciding on the final layout. The process takes hours, and in the end, not all of the blocks the artist brought to the installation are used. Once installation is complete, the negative space between the pieces acts like an elemental glue, holding the blocks in stasis without imposing a rigid, mechanical structure upon them. Chaos becomes palatable and enjoyable within a clearly defined space, without becoming depersonalized by the exacting nature of mechanics and architecture.

Ariotti is ultimately expressing a philosophy of living, one that seeks to unify our primal human emotions and need to create with our modern desire for architectural perfection. By balancing the natural chaos—that leads to so much beauty—with the desire to classify, she engages the viewer in a profound exploration of the simplistic. "There is too much static, noise, and confusion in society," Ariotti explains. "We need to strip things down and become intrigued by the most minor details. If I can make people stop and pay attention to detail, then I'm a success as an artist."