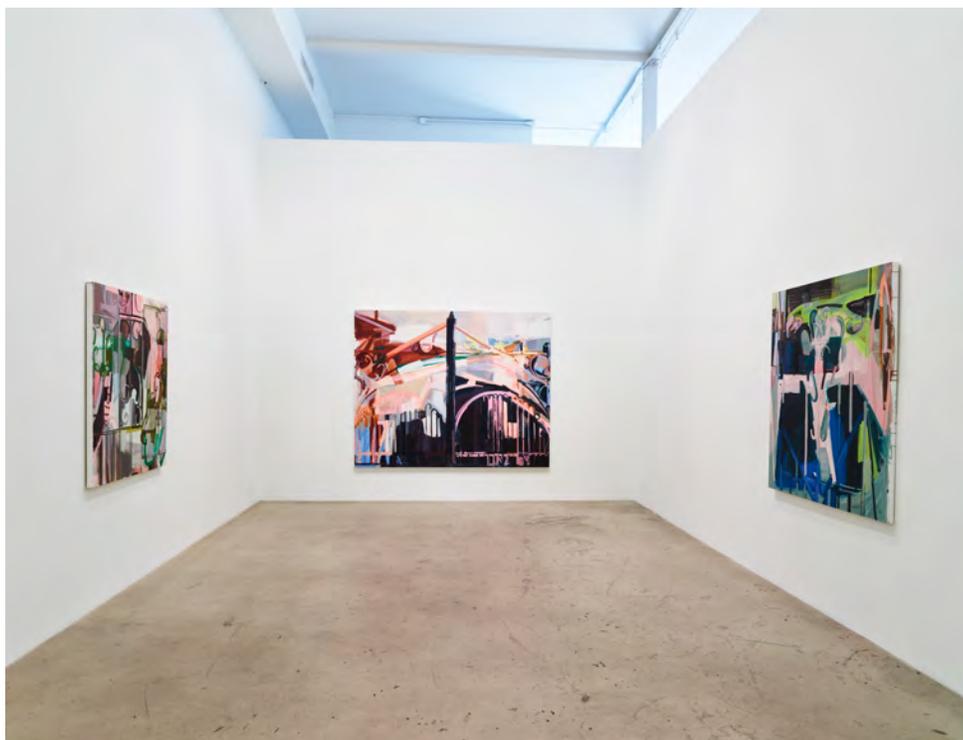




## Sarah Awad Locks Us Out and Lets Us In with her Lush Gate Paintings

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Gates can be entryways, exits, portals, or obstacles. Rich in symbolism, they can mark the only way into a city, a palace, a religious site, or even heaven. But the gates that Sarah Awad captures in her broad-stroked, Fauvist abstractions are the fanciful metal barriers one sees around mansions. Functional yet often ornamental, with wrought iron loops and decorative motifs, they are an embellished take on an somewhat ugly security measure.

In her current show at Diane Rosenstein, “Sarah Awad: Gate Paintings,” the artist cleverly uses gates as a pictorial device, positioning their straight rails and scrolling forged flourishes smack in the foreground, indicating that the threshold between viewer and image might be confrontational and impassible. Playing with the idea of a viewer “entering” a painting, Awad asks the question, how do we get past the surface of a picture if the central image is a barrier? But her approach is more curious than combative, thanks to her vibrant color palette and lyrical abstraction. The works might seem to lock viewers out, but they also spur intrigue; gates are meant to be passed through, after all, and her paintings can feel like an invitation to explore what lies beyond them.



The artist also plays with traditions of ornamentation in art, creating an unlikely convergence of decoration and abstraction. There are byzantine details built into her depictions of gates, their curling embellishments beautifying these borders but also drawing attention to the artist's handling of paint and detail. In some cases, the decoration parallels the kind of intricate blooms and geometric patterns might be carved into the wood of a picture frame.

While her use wild use of color could be the subject of some of these works, in the end the paintings are about Awad's own visual experience. She was born in Pasadena and lives in Los Angeles, where gates of this pseudo-baroque style are everywhere, cordoning off expensive homes and their manicured gardens. Awad has ultimately created a kind of portrait of Southern California that will be instantly recognizable to those who know the area.



A testament to her skill with the brush, Awad has given her gates the same kind of lush sensuality that we saw in her nudes in her breakout 2013 show, "Sarah Awad: The Women" also at Diane Rosenstein. And for something as mundane as a gate to achieve that level of seduction is, well, inviting indeed.

—Maxwell Williams

"Sarah Awad: Gate Paintings" is on view at Diane Rosenstein, Los Angeles, Sept. 12–Oct. 10, 2015.