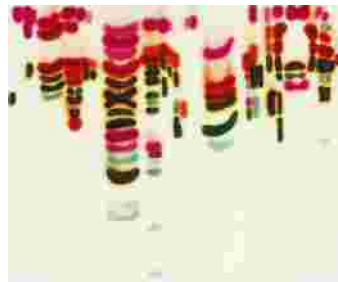




Jaq Chartier
 Chart w/21 Reds, 2008
 acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel
 28 x 36 inches



Jaq Chartier
 Small Chart w/34 Stains, 2008
 acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel
 11 x 11 inches



Jaq Chartier
 Infusion w/Magenta & Red, 2008
 acrylic/stains/paint on wood panel
 20 x 24 inches

Jaq Chartier is an artist based in Seattle, Washington. She maintains an ambitious painting practice and co-organizes, with her husband Dirk Park, Aqua Art Miami, an art fair at two locations in December during Art Basel/Miami Beach. In this interview Jaq provides two different perspectives on gallerists. One is her relationship as a painter represented by a number of galleries across the USA. The other comes from the role reversal she has experienced as the organizer of Aqua Art Miami, and being in the position to choose gallery exhibitors in a competitive situation.

JACKIE: It's not every day that one gets to talk with an artist who has an active exhibition career and who has also developed one of the best satellite fairs at Miami Basel. How did that come about?

JAQ: My husband Dirk and I are both artists and he opened a gallery with some partners in 2004. We had already been going to the Miami fairs as spectators and we were noticing that the west coast was not really being represented. The art fairs that were there at the time were just NADA, Art Basel, and Scope. Art Basel is very international, and the others seemed very New York centric. So, we thought it might be interesting to do something for our coast. But it was just kind of an idea at first.

Then, there was an art fair out here in Portland called "Affair at the Jupiter Hotel" in a little revamped retro motel with all the rooms opening out onto a courtyard, and we thought, "Wouldn't a hotel like this work great for a fair in Miami?" So, when we went to Miami the next time we started looking for a space just out of curiosity. We found the Aqua Hotel completely serendipitously. It has concrete floors with simple white walls and very minimal furniture, plus that great courtyard with the palm trees. And we could see it, we could totally see it. So, we came back to Seattle and started chatting with people, asking "Does anybody want to do this?"

JACKIE: You were chatting to other galleries in Seattle?

JAQ: Yeah. I'm showing with a gallery in Portland, Elizabeth Le... she's one of the biggest ones in the Northwest. She's also a friend, and she got it right away. And we talked with some other dealers in Seattle, many of which we know pretty well.

JACKIE: Now does Dirk still have a gallery?

JAQ: Well, once Aqua took off, Dirk ended up having to pull out of being a partner in the gallery, because he wasn't able to put in as much time as he needed. He concentrated on Aqua. So, that's kind of how this started.

JACKIE: And what year was this?

JAQ: The first art fair we did was in the fall of 2005. We were thinking we'd just take the ground floor of the hotel at first, but we ended up filling the whole place. As soon as we would invite somebody, they would recommend another dealer. Dirk and I already knew a lot of galleries we liked because, being artists, we were really paying attention to them. We'd gone to a lot of art fairs, and we've gone to a lot of "art cities" — that's our vacation. Very quickly, we had more galleries than we could actually fit. That was an unusual situation to be in. We were artists talking to dealers in a situation where we had to decide who we were inviting when usually it's the other way around.

JACKIE: It's not often that we can turn the tables that way.

JAQ: Yeah. Well, the first year it was more of a project. We didn't know if it was going to work. We didn't know if anyone would want to do it again. But it took off. People were handing us business cards saying, "I want to be in this fair."

We found ourselves in a position of looking at galleries and thinking, first of all, we can't fit everybody, which creates problems. And we had to decide who we thought would work in the mix for a good overall program. And it's totally opposite of what we're normally doing as artists. I can empathize more with art dealers now.

I realized that dealers are just people like everyone else. Some of them are really doing a great job, and some are mediocre. Some are very approachable and great business people. Others are very aloof and secretive. As an artist, it made me less intimidated by the whole process of approaching a dealer, talking to a gallery about my work, and just having that relationship. It really made it different for me. I feel much more relaxed when I talk to dealers now.

JACKIE: That's great. I always recommend that artists take on another hat to wear in the art world for even just a little while, because the insights that you get are tremendously important.

JAQ: One thing you realize is that a gallery is not always a good fit. Dirk and I talk about the gallery relationship with artists as being like a marriage, and it's got to be an equal relationship. You've got to be on the same page and treat each other well. Not every gallery is right for an artist, and artists need to be objective about that. Too often we just want to show anywhere and don't think about the long-term consequences.

JACKIE: I think there is nothing more debilitating than having a bad partnership or being with somebody who makes you uncomfortable. It's worse than not showing.

JAQ: Yeah, I was in that kind of position with one gallery until just recently, and it was a huge relief to finally get out of there. My other dealers are great people as well as true professionals, and seeing that contrast really helped me to keep my bearings.

JACKIE: I have to say that the Aqua fair is my favorite of the satellite fairs, because I love the courtyard. I make a point to go there late in the afternoon. I hang around, sit, and put my feet in the little pool of water. It feels really good after walking around all day. I also find that I meet more people there, because I am sitting still. It feels like an oasis in the midst of all the frantic energy elsewhere.

JAQ: That's what struck us about it, too. Now we have this second venue in a warehouse [Aqua Wynwood], and sometimes people ask why we're still doing the Aqua Hotel as well. We can't give it up. It's too cool.

JACKIE: For some galleries, the warehouse space is better for their program.

JAQ: Exactly. Some people like the casualness of showing the work in a hotel room, but others want to move up into a booth fair, which is a more for walls, more like a gallery. Partly, it depends on the type of work, showing art to its best advantage in a crazy whirlwind. But there's also a hierarchy.

When we expanded the fair we added about seventy percent new dealers, and again it was just getting to know all of these people from different walks of life, different backgrounds, and different levels of success. They're all passionate about what they're doing and love the work they're showing. And they are just people. If I didn't do it anymore and I had just gotten that insight out of it, then that would be plenty.

JACKIE: But, you are planning to do it next year? It must be financially beneficial.

JAQ: Well, so far it hasn't been, believe it or not.

JACKIE: Really?

JAQ: It's been a labor of love. But we're through the start-up phase, and it will get better.

JACKIE: When you decide who is going to be in the fair next year, is it still pretty much just you and your husband that make those choices? On what do you base those decisions?

JAQ: We don't have a formal selection committee, and we may be unusual in that way. But we ask a lot of people for their opinions. We know what we like in terms of the art, but don't always know how certain galleries are perceived among collectors.

JACKIE: And that's important because that's the audience that you want to attract at an art fair, the collector.

JAQ: Sure, collectors are very important. The galleries need to sell art or the whole thing falls apart. But we also care about the curators, arts writers, art consultants, and artists. Everyone is looking from a different point of view, and the whole show is a balancing act.

JACKIE: Why did you and your husband start going to art fairs to begin with?

JAQ: Curiosity. That's pretty much it. I mean, we're here in the Northwest and it's a relatively small city compared to Chicago or LA or New York. So, what comes to us is somewhat limited. We have to go out and see things elsewhere. As an artist, an art fair is a great way to see a bunch of galleries in one big swoop and figure out if there is anybody you want to approach.

JACKIE: How should an artist do an art fair? What are some tips?

JAQ: Just look. Take a look at everything. Don't try to talk to the dealers about your work—I think that's usually a big mistake. Just look and see what you're connecting to, pay attention, take notes. You're also looking at the artwork to get inspired: what are you seeing that you find exciting, that makes you want to go back into your own studio and make work? Sometimes an art fair can be depressing. You go and you find the commercialized aspect of the art world heightened.

JACKIE: You know that's how I felt about Basel. It's funny, because the first two days it was energizing looking at all of that art in relation to whatever you are doing in your studio. I felt like I could go back and push it even more. Make it smaller. Make it simpler. Make it more complex. I don't know. Make it out of garbage even. Anything. Whatever you have been holding yourself back from doing, stop and go for it, because just the sheer variety of work that's presented at Basel is thrilling.

But by the last two days of the fair, I had overdosed on the commercial aspect of it. I just felt ill.

JAQ: Yeah. What makes me kind of sick sometimes is to see so much bad work getting so much attention. I just don't get it. And I can find the same thing when I go to New York and I look at a bunch of galleries, but it's like the glass is half full. There's a lot of bad work getting attention, which means that if your work is any good you have a real shot, and even if it's bad something could happen—it's at least possible.

But then there is another aspect, that maybe it has nothing to do with the quality of the art, but just who's advocating for the work. If somebody's powerful enough they can push whatever they want forward. Or they could have a particular thing in mind—if they are a curator, for example, and they have an idea that they want to write about that makes them look good or important—and then they find artists that illustrate that. So maybe success has nothing to do with the work. As an artist, how do you catch that tiger by the tail? There are artists who are constantly trying to reinvent themselves to figure out what the art world wants.

JACKIE: Ugh! That doesn't work.

JAQ: You wouldn't think so, because you can't sustain it over any length of time. But sometimes it does seem to work.

JACKIE: I do think that the bullshit factor shows up pretty quickly. I often say, "The artist's life is hard enough, you have to stay with what you feel passionate about." Maybe nobody else wants tight little figurative paintings at this moment. The art world is concentrating on something else, but if that's where your passion lies, you have to follow it, because it's too hard a life otherwise to make yourself do something you don't want to do.

JAQ: And if all you're interested in is making money, field to be in.

JACKIE: Absolutely. There are much easier ways to make money. Never make art for a market. But I challenge artists to look really hard for who their market is. I think many artists have never grappled with the question, "Who is my audience?"

JAQ: Artists can be frustrated by the gallery situation if they're not really making object-based work—so stop looking for your money there. You can have a show, but you'd spend more time going after curators and shows in museums or something else, not galleries. I think there truly is an audience for everything, but it might not be the audience you think it is. (I love that line from the movie Basquiat: "your audience hasn't even been born yet," ... it really opens things up.)

Even in the commercial market part of the world, like within the gallery world, there are so many different art worlds. I see that a lot with the art fairs. Each fair, especially now with so many art fairs in Miami, is starting to satisfy this or that. And some artists fit in here and some dealers fit in there. The collectors are interested in different things and you can't do it all—you certainly don't want to. But you also can't have any illusions about what you are doing and how it fits in. That's a really hard thing for people to see.

JACKIE: Right. We are ambitious and want to challenge ourselves to make our best work. But it's hard not to sometimes feel a little disappointed if the audience for your work is the gallery in a shopping mall, even if they are selling it well.

JAQ: If that's not the market you want to be in, then don't put your foot in there. Stay out. I mean, you have to make a choice. Are you going to go with whatever happens to fall into your lap, or take charge of it? I've actually faced this a couple of times, where I've had a certain type of commercial gallery approach me and I know I could sell more work with them. But my work would be in a context I don't want to be in. I've asked myself, "was this my big chance and I just said no?" But I'm pretty sure in the long run it's going to be better that I didn't do it.

JACKIE: Do you have goals?

JAQ: Not really. I think the only goal I have is to protect my studio time.

JACKIE: And I think with all you do that's probably a challenge for you.

JAQ: Well, for a while when I first started out it was, and then I reached a point where I had four galleries and all I was doing was working in the studio. Then Aqua started, and Aqua was like I accidentally had an art fair like accidentally having a baby. So okay, I've got this thing now and it's got a life. Last year was supposed to be when things got a little easier again, so I could get back into my studio full time.

JACKIE: If you hadn't started Aqua Wynwood.

JAQ: If we hadn't grown. It turned out to be a good decision for the fair, but it was so much more work, and we were scared to death at certain points. It's been very distracting. But in the end I do what the painting needs me to do. It has a loud voice and it always gets me back on track.

JACKIE: I understand what it's like to have something like that suddenly land in your life and you have to figure out how to make a practice around it.

JAQ: You were asking me about goals and I just wanted to say that I am actually pretty ambitious about where I would like to be.

JACKIE: So you do have goals around where you are headed. How do they work with your studio practice?

JAQ: I believe working in the studio is what will get me to those goals. It's a slow accumulation over a very long period of time, and not everyone is cut out for it. Deadlines are a big help, having something on the calendar to keep me focused. Before I had galleries I would set up an open house in my studio. If you're working at your kitchen table, thing there. At one point it was applying for grad school or juried shows. You need to have a body of work to apply for something, so you make the body of work. Figure out what gets you reer is totally about self-motivation, a force of will against entropy.

JACKIE: Has your work with Aqua changed your relationship with the artists you know?

JAQ: Not so much with the artists. There might be a few situations where people that are friends are showing with galleries that we didn't invite, so there is a little tension, but you know—I don't really know. At some point you just have to do what you think is the right thing to do. It has created some moments of tension with other dealers we are friends with.

JACKIE: I know. It's not easy to be in the position to reject somebody.

JAQ: No, and it gives me more sympathy for the galleries having to deal with all those slides and CDs waiting for replies. It is very unpleasant to be on either side of it. I was surprised to find that the galleries don't always take rejection very well. I mean, artists are supposed to take it with total grace, and you'd think that galleries would have some empathy for that side of it.

JACKIE: Nobody likes rejection. It feels personal even when it's not.

JAQ: If I've approached a gallery and they've said no, I'm still expected to go in to openings and look at that person and say "hi" as if nothing happened. Responding badly to rejection pretty much closes the door.

JACKIE: How do you cope with that?

JAQ: You just have to let it go, though it still hurts every time. If they're uninterested, it doesn't mean that you're a horrible artist or that the work will never find a home. It's just a bad fit for that gallery. Period.

JACKIE: It's not an indictment of your work.

JAQ: Right. But the galleries don't always take it as well.

JACKIE: Actually, I had an artist say once to me, "I love the art fairs. Now galleries are in the position of getting rejected. Let's see how it feels to them."

JAQ: I know. Well we had one dealer who we invited the first year that we didn't invite the second year, because we wanted to make room for some new people. Then we invited her back the third year, but she was so personally offended that she just could not get over it.

JACKIE: Did she come back?

JAQ: No. Galleries don't even bring all of their own artists to the fair, so that's another type of selection. Why can't they see that we have to do the same thing? Some of the dealers have a lot more ego about it. And it's not even their own work that you're rejecting.

JACKIE: Well it is in a way. It's their program and that's just as personal.

JAQ: I don't think it's ever quite as personal as making the work, having seen it from being on the other side with my husband and his gallery. But I know what you mean.

JACKIE: I started a non profit gallery and ran it for years. Although I knew it wasn't personal, if the gallery didn't get a certain grant I'd feel, "Wow. I'm really doing great work here and how come they didn't see that."

JAQ: Well, that's very similar to how artists feel applying to things and not getting them. You wonder, why am I not getting this? What am I doing wrong? And then you're second guessing everything in your studio and sometimes it has nothing to do with that.

JACKIE: I find that artists also have a difficult time figuring out the relationship between money and their art.

JAQ: Yeah, one problem is we often undervalue what we're doing and maybe even feel a little queasy about getting paid a decent amount for a piece. But if you need to hire somebody and realize what you'll have to pay them, it's a shock. You want how much just to gesso my panels? Or to ship it across the country? And artists who do commissions and have to work with subcontractors realize what those people are going to charge, and it starts to give you some sense of what you should be paid just for the labor part, not to mention the creative part.

I've thought a lot about the conflict that artists have with money. I'm working with galleries and getting feedback from the market all the time, and it can affect what I do in the studio in confusing ways if I don't watch it. An artist might have a pretty clear sense of what to do next, but it might not be marketable right away, if at all. If your gallery is saying, "I can't sell this, but I can sell that" it can mess with your head—especially when you also really need the money.

JACKIE: And sometimes when you do set off on a new idea, the first couple works aren't really up to snuff because you are finding your way. If you have had a successful body of work in other ways, it's hard to allow yourself time to get your new work to the quality that you want.

JAQ: Yeah, there never seems to be enough time to just let things play out. Also, I think that even if you're clearly moving in a new direction that's valid and that's actually really strong, people get used to what you've already been doing. We're creatures of habit—as much as we want the new, we also want what's comfortable. If the dealer knows that they have collectors that love what you're doing, why mess with a good thing? But for the artist that can quickly become a trap. I've actually had people say, "oh, can you just make a few more of those red ones," and my first thought is, "No!"

JACKIE: Red sells!

JAQ: I could make it, but I'm not going to just because you asked me to. Especially now that you've asked me, I won't make it. This isn't a juvenile response, I think it's a protective one.

JACKIE: How do you establish your prices?

JAQ: Initially, from looking at work that I thought was at a similar place in the artist's career and taking advice from my dealer. Now that I'm in a different part of my career, it's a little bit easier because I am working with galleries in different parts of the country. There might be one that wants to push it up a little bit and the other one thinks that's too fast, so I come up with a consensus and then find a place there. But I try not to move prices in a rapid way because you can't really go back once you raise them.

JACKIE: Very smart as we are probably about to enter into a real recession. There's going to be some surprised artists and dealers out there.

JAQ: One artist I know can't make small work no matter how good it is, and I don't make big work. And of course people always want the thing you're not doing. I feel like the smaller work is safer right now, so it could be a good moment for artists like me. I remember seeing Elizabeth Murray do a lecture in Seattle. She was showing these small works and at the same time she came to a really big

piece, she'd say, "...and I still own that one..." So it doesn't matter who you are, you could still have a hard time selling those big pieces. And where are you going to store them? Having said that, it's funny that I'm in the process of finishing up the largest multi-panel piece I've ever made.

JACKIE: This is the last question I tend to ask people. What three pieces of advice would you give someone starting out as an artist?

JAQ: Find a way to make money that doesn't require you to work full time, where you are getting a good wage per hour, so you have time to be in your studio. This goes into my second one, which is protect your studio time however you can. And the third one is just make work. You have got to be making stuff. I have a friend who was teaching and she said that her students, who were just undergrad second year, were asking, "How do you get into galleries?" And she said, "Hang on a minute. You've got to make some work first." Sometimes people jump the gun and they just think about the career before they've actually got anything going.

JACKIE: They put the career before the work.

JAQ: And you can't do that.

JACKIE: Jaq. It has been a pleasure to speak with you.

Jaq Chartier is a painter and the co-creator of the art fair Aqua Art Miami. Her galleries include Ameringer Yohe, New York; Haines Gallery, San Francisco; Elizabeth Leach, Portland; and Platform Gallery, Seattle. Her work has been recently featured in exhibitions at Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland; and the Kunst-Museum Ahlen, Germany; and in collections including Microsoft and the Progressive Art Collection. Awards include an Artist Trust/Washington State Arts Commission Fellowship, and a PONCHO Special Recognition Award from the Seattle Art Museum's Betty Bowan Committee. She was also a recent Creative Capital Grant finalist and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award nominee.