

# BOMB

## Full of Life: Hayley Barker Interviewed by Paul Maziar

*Paintings that find the ineffable in the everyday.*



Hayley Barker, *Entrance to BozoMag, 2022*, oil on linen, 86 × 68 inches. Courtesy of the artist and BozoMag.

Hayley Barker's painting practice rides a fine line between the quotidian and the infinite. Deeply moved by experiences in everyday life, such as making art and communing with others, and guided by genuine curiosity and care, Barker's paintings display an affinity with the ineffable. They're connected to the simple and profound world around her: garden life in bloom, animals, architecture, and the often-repellant aspects of modernity. She renders the familiar in a way that amplifies its presence and brings surprise.

Over the last decade or so, she's battled cancer, found a new city to call home, and devised a way to live on her own terms. I conducted the following interview with Barker in BozoMag gallery alongside its proprietor, Danny Bowman.

—Paul Maziar

**Paul Maziar**

Life has slowed down since the pandemic. Have you noticed changes in your perception and in the information that interests and moves you?

**HB**

It does. It's in tandem with being able to live off of my paintings, going with my innate sense of time and creative flow, and following my natural schedule, not resisting it.

I quit my day job a few months before the pandemic so I could paint more. When the pandemic hit, I was living in a place on Los Angeles's Westside with a big yard and garden. My studio was in a converted shed-type building on the property where I was able to look out to the garden and paint. I kept a part-time gig as an artist's assistant to cover the gap, but when I was laid off, I had all the time in the world to paint. I fell deep into that lifestyle, spending more time outside. I love alone time; I'm pretty much a total introvert, and I think this time has only made me even more appreciative of that part of myself, to respect it, remembering it's something I need to feed so I don't run out of energy.



Hayley Barker, *BOZO Front Yard, 2022*, oil on linen, 86 × 68 inches. Photo by Paul Salvesson. Courtesy of the artist and BozoMag.

**PM**

Do you paint from photographs?

**HB**

Exclusively. I worked from life a long time ago, but I don't anymore. Colors from life are too loud, too present for me when painting or drawing. It's like I can't get over them. I need distance to take that landscape and turn it into something that's more of a formal set of relationships. I like to be able to forget the natural colors and use whatever ones seem right. It's all about color. I don't want to be mimetic.

**PM**

The result of that remove is satisfying; everything that happens after seems more radical, though you have a more or less simple scene. These objects, the pots and things, seem reimagined.

Landscape painting is pretty traditional, but you're able to do something with it that's all your own with simple changes of color and skewed perspectives.

**HB**

Thank you for using the word radical. It feels that way sometimes! For years, especially living in Oregon and seeing the landscape there and with people wanting to paint pretty things, I never wanted to be a sell-it-at-the-beach-gift-shop type painter. Landscape is important, and my interest in it relates to my belief that if you don't value your immediate surroundings, there's no reason to value the rest of life on this planet. If you don't attend to, revere, and love it, why would you care about anything else?

**PM**

I wonder about the spiritual in your work. I imagine your practice as more or less contemplative in the sense that you immerse yourself in your spaces to feel connected to your world.

**HB**

It is. I don't paint anything I haven't spent time with. I'm not seeking "a lovely" landscape to paint in order to share a transcendent feeling. I'm interested in place as it pertains to one's relationship to it—one that changes over afternoons, seasons, a lifetime. This place where we're talking, Bozo Mag, I've spent so much time here, and it's very special to me.

**PM**

I want to ask you about your evolving relationship to BozoMag.

**HB**

It's changed in part because Danny lives here now; we have more access to the space.

**Danny Bowman**

Since 2021, we have different spaces to use. We hang out inside for dinner or outside for parties—gatherings where art isn't the focus; it's just friends gathering. Community focused.

**PM**

You hold communal spaces to be super important. This isn't just, like, a professional space you visit.

**DB**

This space is special to both Hayley and I. We've been able to quit our jobs and support ourselves because of it. It's helped other amazing artists too, who are also our friends. There's a magic to it. It's had a good energy for at least ten to fifteen years. We've redone it with the help of LA painter Alexander Meadows.



Hayley Barker, *BOZO Front Porch, 2022*, oil on linen, 86 × 68 inches. Photo by Paul Salvesson. Courtesy of the artist and BozoMag.

**PM**

How have those relationships influenced you?

**HB**

The BozoMag fam has been a part of my life since I moved here. While I had a career pre-LA—back in Portland, Oregon—I feel like I kind of grew up with the BozoMag crew. I went through a number of creative and personal evolutions, and Danny always supported me. I also met a dear friend, the fantastic painter Amy Bessone, through Bozo. We three have become close friends over the years, and I trust their creative instincts deeply. To this day I have them over for real talk, real feedback. It's easy to get folks over who just fawn, but I appreciate the mutual respect and unbridled support we share. They've seen all I've been through and still root for me.

**PM**

There's intensity to your paintings. You didn't begin as a painter, right? You started out doing performance and things.

**HB**

Right. And the performative is still with me in the private realm. It's an emotional journey to make a painting, and I always feel that that's the heaviest part of the labor: being available for that vulnerability and using that energy to make the work. Everything else is cake compared to that. It's a freedom that I'm grateful for, but it's also exhausting.

**PM**

To be guided by that.

**HB**

Yeah, relying on it. Tapping into the energy I want to bring to the landscapes; they're part mirror in a way.

**PM**

Do you want to produce a scene as you see it? Not what it looks like, but how you see.

**HB**

Yeah, but maybe not how I see but how I feel and how that affects what I see.

**PM**

In the sacred, we find deeper meaning. You draw inspiration from the quotidian and can make it seem sublime. What do you find to be sacred?

**HB**

I find everything to be sacred. Maybe not sublime, but certainly sacred.



Hayley Barker. Photo by Maya Fuhr. Courtesy of Night Gallery, Los Angeles.

**PM**

Do you will your pleasures or take them as they come?

**HB**

There is no willing of pleasure. Can't force it. The spirit of the erotic, pleasure, can be all around us, in us, through us if we're grounded enough to experience life from an embodied place, which I haven't always been able to do. I've suffered a number of difficult setbacks in my life. But today, I can show up for life most of the time. I humbly acknowledge this privilege; I know not everyone can show up whole, well, resourced. Today, I have a small team of women artists who work with me. I still do all the painting, but they help with literally everything else. It's a HUGE blessing.

I feel so grateful that at least for today I can be present for life as it unfolds. And in being present can experience embodied pleasure when she shows up.

*Hayley Barker: Bozo House is on view at BozoMag in Los Angeles until September 25.*

*Paul Maziar writes about art and books for various publications such as the Brooklyn Rail, Los Angeles Review of Books, Oregon ArtsWatch, and LA Weekly. A book of his art writings, One Foot in the Other World, was published by AC Books. To the Air, his poetry book in collaboration with artist Cynthia Lahti, was published by the Cooley Gallery at Reed College in 2020. He is a member of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art.*