



Two Light. 2018. Acrylic and sharpie on canvas. 5 1/2' x 5 1/2'.

“Detroit becomes quickly uncool if we try and dissect the *what* of the place,” artist **Melanie Janisse-Barlow** says of the city that serves as her second home—a sentiment that carries over to her artistic treatment of a 100-year-old coney island restaurant at 118 W. Lafayette Street in downtown Detroit that has become the subject of her latest series of paintings.

Born across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario, Janisse-Barlow was introduced to the **Lafayette Coney Island** menu, it’s unique linguistic heritage (its lexicon of “loose loose,”

THE LAFAYETTE SERIES

Melanie Janisse-Barlow

“heavy heavy,” and “up on the tree light”), and its authentically gritty Detroit ethos as a young girl by her father and grandfather, who lived on Cadillac Street and had a funeral home on East Jefferson. “The men in my family have always gone there after Tigers games,” she says. It’s the grit and distinctly Detroit feel of the well worn space that Janisse-Barlow captures in each painting in *The*

Lafayette Series. Of her method, Janisse-Barlow says she didn’t want to approach the pieces in the series knowing everything about her favourite restaurant and haunt, but rather wanted to see what came of *not knowing* things such as the histories of the employees, or too much of the back story of the place. The results are stunning portraits of the building and the people that make Lafayette Coney Island and Detroit institution and a cultural touchstone the world over. There is sense of humor about the place that is unique to

Detroit and that Detroiters understand: it doesn’t take itself too seriously, something Janisse-Barlow depicts with vibrancy and candor.



Measuring five-feet-six inches square and rendered in oil and acrylic on canvas, the paintings in *The Lafayette Series* seek to preserve the informal mystique of the eatery by focusing on the nuances of architecture, color and interior design: Lafayette Coney Island’s landmark grey



Gimme One Of Each. 2018. Acrylic and sharpie on canvas. 5 1/2' x 5 1/2'.

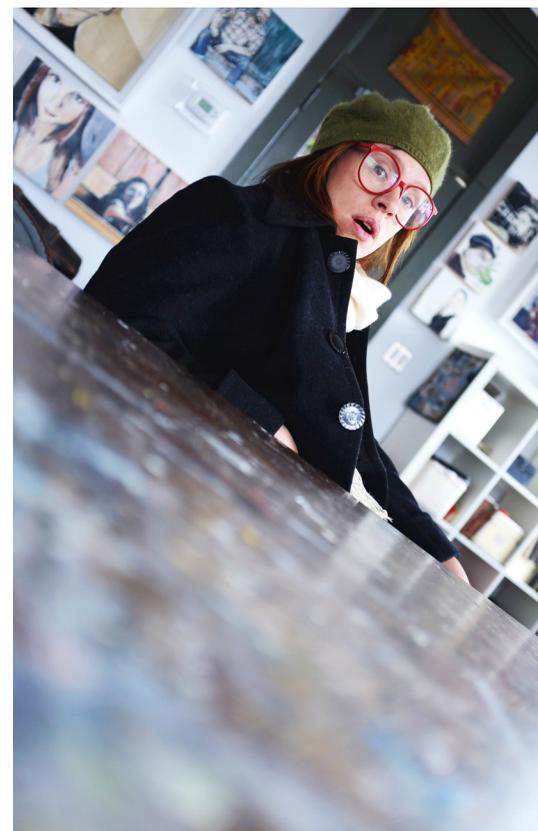
façades that tower over the street on both the West Lafayette Street and Michigan Avenue sides of the building; the muted yellow of the wall tile beneath the idiosyncratic green of the paint; the tessellated tile floor; the worn countertop and chrome pie case that are the hallmarks of countless diners and delis, become, somehow, special here; the framed photos of civic leaders, pundits and sports legends that line the walls, hinted at with deft gestures over the shoulders of her human subjects—these vibrant men who sling coney dogs, onion rings and stick doughnuts; who stand with their back to the viewer while they tend a griddle top crowded with hotdogs; or crowd the frame in a moment of brotherly levity; or loom over you ready to take an order, on the cusp of speaking the secret language of the Lafayette coney dog.... They engage their viewer, who feels as if they are seated on a swivel stool at the lunch counter, part of this space.



The paintings of *The Lafayette Series* highlight what the careful late-night and post-game diners already know: that there is more to Lafayette Coney Island than meets the eye. It is hallowed ground whether you're a Tigers or Wings fan, or whether you know your rock 'n' roll lore (it's where Patti Smith first met Fred "Sonic" Smith) Lafayette Coney Island is heterotopic and hermetic; unifying and levelling; in the public eye, but awash in the attitude of insider knowledge. "It's far more intelligent than a coney dog place should be," Janisse-Barlow says of the Lafayette, and these bright, arresting paintings bring that curious intelligence and Motor City grit into the fine art world.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Melanie Janisse-Barlow (B.A. Communications '92, Concordia University, Montreal; B.F.A. '00, Emily Carr University, Vancouver; M.F.A. '14, Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto) has work in private collections around the world. Her ongoing *Poet Series*, a self-curating/practopoietic series of portraits of Canadian poets, has reached 80 pieces and has gained national media coverage in Canada and the US. *Ship of Fools*, an installation on a 24-foot Shark sailboat, was performed in Toronto and on Lake St. Clair for the Media City Film Festival. Commissioned works include a portrait of The Honourable Justice Edward Ducharme for the Superior Court of Ontario chambers. Her work has been represented by the Luft Gallery in Toronto, and she has authored two collections of poetry: *Orioles in the Oranges* (Guernica, 2009), and *Thicket* (Palimpsest Press, 2019).



Melanie Janisse-Barlow in her studio.

For sales inquiries please contact:

Melanie Janisse-Barlow

1017 Church Street

Windsor, ON, N9A 4V3

Tel: 416-407-0266

Email: melanie.janisse@gmail.com