In December 2018, I won a Faculty Development grant to help fund my travel to an exhibition in Rome. The Exhibition, “Los Angeles Is, Once Again”, was hosted by the Temple University Gallery and was curated by Camilla Boemio who has twice curated pavilions at the Venice Biennale, the Tate Britain, and other major venues world-wide. The gallery is also a historically important venue, having exhibited many noteworthy Italian and European artists over the course of several decades. I exhibited two works from my Black Paintings series that were beautifully situated by a window, bathing them in bluish light refracted from walkways along the Tiber River. The exhibition was well received and obtained a review in local press.

While in Rome, I was able to spend time with Ms. Boemio, building upon a partnership that will lead to future exhibitions. We discussed hosting future exhibitions of European artists in Los Angeles at Durden and Ray, my collective’s gallery in downtown LA, as well as bringing more LA artists to Europe. She had organized an exhibition at our gallery earlier in the year which was one of our top reviewed exhibitions for the year. We would look forward to having her back again.

I also used my time in Rome to take photos and visit sites that would provide new ideas for my paintings and sculptures. One which I expect will be the most generative, was the Ecstasy of St. Theresa by Bernini. I had attempted to see this sculpture during my last visit to Rome 18 years ago, but was never able to locate the small church it is housed in. While in college, I studied the sculpture of the saint floating on a cloud, overcome by a divine experience represented by a smiling angel about to plunge a golden arrow into her heart. It has long been one of my favorite works of art, but what I had never seen before in any photos was the detailed texture of the stonework, nor the space, light, and materials surrounding the sculpture. The textbooks I read always pointed out the impressive veracity of St. Theresa’s windswept robes, but none noted the difference in texture between them, her skin, and the clouds upon which she floats. The clouds, for instance, were marked with numerous gouges that gave them a fluffy, cotton-like appearance. Raining down above the sculpture were golden bands, representing rays of light. They faded into an actual window hidden in the architecture somewhere above the chapel. Surrounding the chapel were pillars and numerous panels of intensely colored natural stones in marbled greens, ochres, and reds.

My work has long dealt with representations of light, using luminescent or iridescent materials, certain carefully adjusted color combinations, or ray-like forms. I found the sort of rays depicted by Bernini were also presented at other sites I visited, such as in the Signorelli Chapel at the Cathedral of Orvieto. That chapel also presented another interesting meeting of light and stone, using very thinly cut sheets of marble as the transparent panels of its stained glass windows. My work has also adopted the use of precious and semi-precious stones that serve as hidden treasures half buried in paint and gestural marks. In addition to the marriage of light and stone, I was taken by the religious, yet sensual portrayal of St Theresa, exuding divine ecstasy through carnal expression.

For a forthcoming series of paintings, I plan to adopt some of the visual and material language that I saw in these churches. My most recent paintings focus on female explorers, who stepped well beyond the norms of their time to travel the world and discover unseen sights. In my work, their faces are partly covered, especially the eyes. They are shrouded by swirls of thick paint, radiating marks of iridescent paint, mandala-like forms, expressively painted compasses, and numerous other marks that allow me to explore my creative breadth. Almost every work involves something I have never tried before. The swirling composition and variety of marks and colors invite viewers to become engaged visual explorers themselves. The general forms also reflect the shapes I see behind my closed eyelids during meditation. Hence there is a merging of both inner and outer exploration, as well as dynamic and contemplative
qualities. Now, with what I have gleaned from the works I saw in Italy, I plan to push the merger of both transcendent and imminent qualities through the contrast in textures, materials, and specific compositional elements.

*Installation view of my black on black paintings at Temple University Gallery showing their luminous effect*

*Installation view at Temple University Gallery*
The Ecstasy of St. Theresa by Gianlorenzo Bernini showing rays and variety of carved textures

View of chapel surrounding Bernini’s sculpture showing a variety of colored stones
Windows at the Cathedral of Orvieto made from thinly carved marble