

OOLONG GALLERY



Opening Saturday Sept 27 6-8pm

Artist Talk Sunday 1pm

Oolong Gallery Presents

The Pleated Saeculum by **Erin Morrison**

09/27 – 11/03, 2025

Text by **Jennifer S. Li:**

Erin and I connected during a time when we were both, at various points, going through pregnancy, miscarriage, birth, and the confusing periods of postpartum and motherhood. We are both mothers to two boys, with wide age gaps—my boys are almost 6 years apart, and hers, Guston (named after Phillip Guston, as only a true artist would) and Townes, are 7 years apart. These age gaps weren't intentional, but just one of many examples of how we are beholden to forces other than those of our own choosing.

In my conversations with Erin leading up to this show, she asks: *What is the difference between a wrinkle and a pleat?* A pleat is deliberate, while a wrinkle is inadvertent and happenstance. A wrinkle may be meandering and spontaneous, whereas a pleat is on a resolute, undeviating, straight path. In our lives, we may set out to create a pleat, but a wrinkle emerges, or interrupts us, instead.

A mother passes the pandemic days by accompanying her child through five arduous hours of remote learning on the computer. This is balanced afterwards by fresh air on the beach and art-making sessions. She passes the time by waiting. While she waits, she creates rituals.

In 2020, Erin found herself living in Hong Kong when the pandemic hit. She was pregnant and managing young Guston's care under strict pandemic policies. Every day, after yet another tedious and enervating distance learning session, Erin sought balance by taking Guston to the beach (due to the stifling limits of city living during the pandemic, the family moved to the rustic Lamma Island of Hong Kong), followed by art lessons wherein they would create rice paper collages.

The push and pull between wrinkles and pleats is evident in Erin's new body of work completed this year. The genesis of these poured, cast, and painted relief works is rooted in the series of collages Erin began with her son during the pandemic. As with the collages, she cuts and lays out stencils that will determine the final composition and topography of the piece. Combining age-old casting methods and traditional painting techniques, the gypsum is poured over a burlap base that creates the structure of the work.

In *The Last Word*, Erin contemplates the complexities of communication with hospital staff during the birth of Townes, and her summoning the strength to attempt a VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Cesarean, which many medical practitioners try to avoid). The shapely forms of *Interceptor* include copper wire, referencing women's health and IUDs, and, sadly, the menacing intrusion of politics in this ultimately personal sphere. *Lamma Rain* evokes the subtropical atmosphere during Erin's early morning runs or open water swims on Lamma Island. Similarly, *Moon Summoning* was made while Erin was living in Colorado, where she spent many winter evenings observing the pink moon over the snowy hillside.

The artist Lari Pittman, Erin's professor during her UCLA MFA days, once pointed out the "call-and-response" aspect in her work. The call and response is characterized by a musical phrase that is then returned in a related form in the next passage. In Erin's paintings, shapes and silhouettes in one painting reappear or resemble those in the works that follow. These passages are like echoes of each other, or like the resemblance between a mother and child. There are also call-and-response exchanges to forebears and peers who serve as inspiration to Morrison, such as Judy Chicago, Miyoko Ito, Loie Hollowell, Hilma Af Klint, and others.

The paintings are a meditation on time: there is the length of the lifetime and lived experience that is conjured and poured into the physical paintings. There is the time it takes for the gypsum to set. And then, the brevity and balance of time as Erin works with distemper, a pigment based in animal skin glue with rapid drying times that necessitate a deftness of hand.

The exhibition's title pulls from a piece of writing in which Morrison has found resonance, by the author and historian Rebecca Solnit: "There's an Etruscan word, *saeculum*, that describes the span of time lived by the oldest person present, sometimes calculated to be about a hundred years. In a looser sense, the word means the expanse of time during which something is in living memory. Every event has its *saeculum*, and then its sunset

when the last person who fought in the Spanish Civil War or the last person who saw the last passenger pigeon is gone.”

Erin’s response to Solnit’s call: “I have always found a raw power in Etruscan art, particularly the tradition of painted bas-relief. After spending time in Sicily, I better understand the value of preservation. The longer something remains in living memory, the more value it holds. Americans do not live with this sensibility. We are always in a state of renovation. I find there is a value in looking back for inspiration, to other cultures, to the aesthetics and traditions that brought us to where we are today.”

In this new show at Oolong Gallery, which includes brand new works made this year as well as a selection of pieces made over the course of the ten years that I have known Erin, we watch her executing the pleat and embracing the wrinkles that inevitably arise.

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Erin Morrison (b. 1985, Little Rock, AR) studied painting and sculpture at Memphis College of Art and UCLA (MFA class of 2014). She has exhibited internationally with solo and group presentations at Ochi Projects, The Pit, and others; and she has been featured in publications including *Hyperallergic*, *The Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *New American Paintings*. Currently based in Fayetteville, Arkansas, she continues to explore the intersections of lived experiences and her compulsion as a maker. She recently completed a residency at Officina Stamperia del Notaio in Tusa, Sicily, which further enriched her printmaking practice. The relief works from 2025 were produced while she was living in Basalt, CO.

Jennifer S. Li is an art advisor and writer based in Los Angeles. Her writing appears regularly in publications such as *Art in America*, *Frieze*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Sight Unseen*, *Architectural Digest*, and more.