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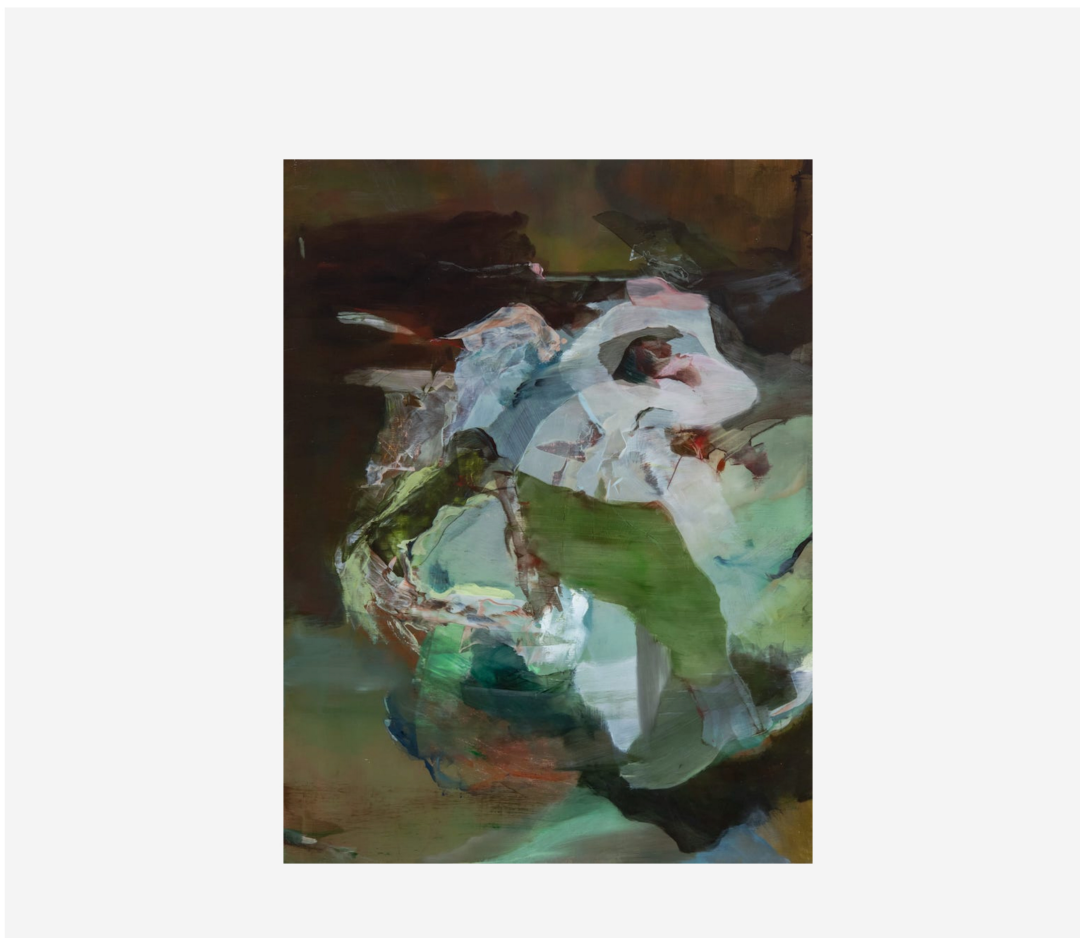
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Hollis Heichemer: The Beauty of a Context, Revealed

Hollis Taggart // - October 09, 2021

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Hollis Heichemer's paintings, currently on view at **Hollis Taggart Gallery** in New York City, recognize how volatile the natural world we inhabit truly is: in a matter of seconds, tranquility can become violent, and the uprooting and unsettling character of nature thereafter permeates our own consciousness. Even subtle tectonic shifts, where the plates that make up the earth's crust move toward and sometimes away from one another, are not singular. Rather, all of our surroundings are constantly in a state of flux. The resulting phenomena is ubiquitous, likely because of its constancy.

The shifting and movement of seasonal changes is what Heichemer is most interested in capturing. Different colors, affected by climate and the length of day, interplay on a single canvas. These paintings are about what has been experienced, but also a reaction to

what is experienced; offering a window and approximation to the natural world and the fast moving changes nature encapsulates. The paintings are alive in a sense, not because they come off as fresh or adhere to any trend in painting, but because chaos and movement are embedded in them. In places one can see vegetation or rushing water; or the sudden appearance of darkness covering the sky. All of it capable of taking place in a flash.



Contained herein are the visceral; the emotions that denote energy and breath. Within these realities a powerful and primal understanding of our surroundings takes hold. Nature is filled with these convulsions. They are effortless and seem subtle, but if you look closely, they are cataclysmic too. In a single painting you can see a patch of vegetation growing, and nearly simultaneously watch it collide into something dying, while another color interferes to render water cascading in another area of the composition. All of this coexisting, just as you would find in nature.

Each of us processes the resulting effect on our consciousness as we react to these adjustments and transitions. As she paints, Heichemer captures this very revelatory process of movement, rather than the conventional, seemingly solitary landscape scene, which rarely demonstrates inclimate variation. But she doesn't do it while being stationary with a pochade box, rather, it is the amalgamation of the lived experience she's had while walking or running through nature. It's the aggregation of those stimuli she thereafter records on the canvas. Heichemer is not trying to render a landscape per se, via direct observation or even by employing memory for instance, but the information obtained from placement in and around the natural world manifests itself as she later processes the information in the studio. In this way the environment directly influences Heichemer. The result is a kind of plein air abstraction, which is first and foremost about closely experiencing her surroundings, and thereafter an experiential reckoning with her efforts to understand this phenomena. While it can be said that the paintings are linked and tethered to experiential form, it isn't concerned with depicting realism, at least not in any conventional or illustrative way.

In addition to the observational practice Heichemer employs, it must be emphasized that she is not trying to capture a particular instance in nature either. Rather, she is working within the variability of a time continuum. As such, they are visual, narrative clusters of the dramatic shifts that can happen, even within a short amount of temporal space, whose elements are asked to coexist in the painting. Just as with nature, these complex paintings are sometimes beautiful, sometimes ominous, but always intriguing; the paintings adeptly capture the moment of collision and transition asking the viewer to evaluate our relationship to nature not as a stationary event, but with the awareness of robust and subtle movement.

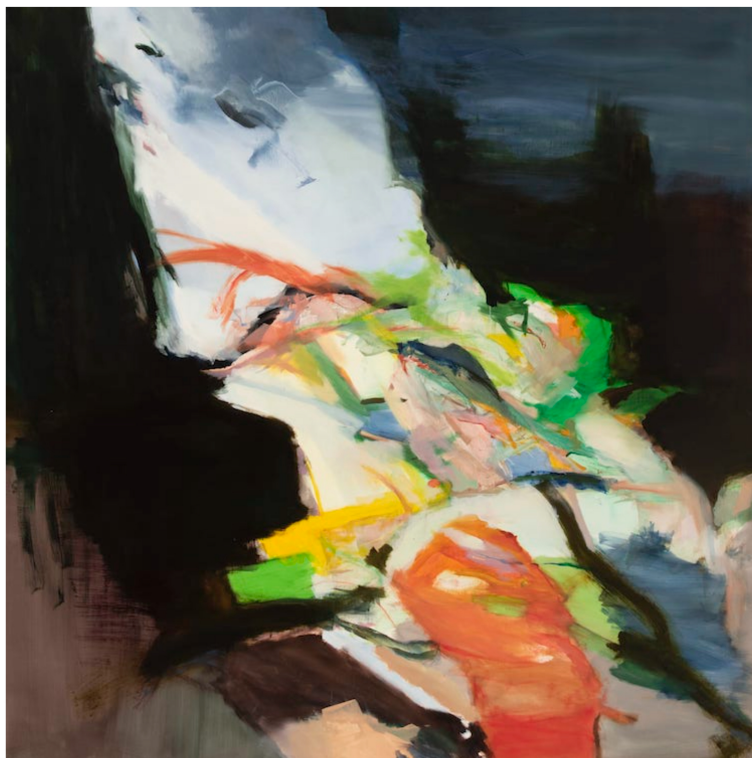




Heichemer utilizes a number of devices to manifest her painting practice. First she pays close attention to negative space and intentionally incorporates it in parts of the canvas where her first painting passes may have eliminated it; she also uses a thinner medium to add a top layer of translucence which lets you look through the last layer of paint and invites rich associations and new visual clues to form; and her brush line utilizes brush contouring as she adds what look like organic elements, sometimes uneven lines, throughout the paintings, which very purposefully unit the compositions.

Her painting, "bird song," (oil on linen, 20 x 20 inches, 2021) exemplifies how Heichemer amplifies negative space to unify the whole. The original, lighter elements appearing on the right of the canvas, are linked back to the central organic forms in the left portion of the painting, because she has added light-colored paint breaking open the shape she had previously created. It makes windows the viewer can look through, as if peering through the branches of a tree in the natural landscape, denying it's otherwise impenetrability. By applying a thin layer of over-paint in certain places, she also lets the translucency supplant traditional focal points. The eye isn't looking to attract you to a particular place or vault amongst a few disparate elements as it might normally do, rather, it falls through the paintings into other rich, yet subtle, expanses of color.

While the contour lines she creates serve as harnesses uniting the whole, Heichemer is careful not to overly rely on the thickness of paint to make a statement or to suggest lushness. The paintings have just as much paint as they need, nothing more. Richness is instead achieved by expanding the depth of view and promoting color relationships. In many ways, color is the subject of some of these paintings. Perhaps it is just fortuity given nature is so rich with pigment (think varieties of green, brown, and blue); but it feels as if Heichemer is anchoring the works in the moody way our vision processes such wide variability. In her works, they overlap one another. Color is critical, with emphasis placed on earth browns and vegetative greens. Light and dark interplay, as do shapes and perspective, which offer form. The end result is elusive. It doesn't offer itself as a landscape, yet it is. It retains just enough elements of form and natural terrain, all the while offering an experiential sensation.



Some of Heichemer's marks are hard to fully deconstruct. But in places she begins a line, and as she's holding her brush during a gestural movement, one can deduce that she twists the brush mid-stroke. She's making one mark, but the turning of her forearm allows the color from the other side of the brush to blend with the original throughline. The resulting elements don't just sit atop the painting, they integrate into the composition and help connote atmospheric sensations of falling, as if gravityless, or even suggest the natural elements of a root, branch, or river stream.

In one painting, "skipping stones," (oil on board, 40 x 30 inches, 2021) Heichemer segments the canvas into a tetrptych. Four equally sized panels are joined to make one larger piece. Each vignette is reminiscent of the grammatical arrangement known as parataxis, where each clause, though separated, is not subordinated to the other. There isn't the hierarchy of value which compartmentalization

often forces. The separation is ultimately obviated since Heichemer joins the elements with painting over the joined seams, which again consolidates the whole. In this painting, it is also apparent that Heichemer thins her paint with some medium, such as linseed oil, allowing her to achieve a translucency in the overpainting.

“Skipping stones” could easily fail as a painting. At first glance, fusing together four, basically distinct canvases in a single unit, presents a likely disjointed presentation. Yet there is something about how the sudden transitions from one compartmentalized area to another works to accurately capture the sudden transitions we observe in nature. How would Heichemer otherwise present this phenomena? She is acutely aware that for no apparent reason, things end abruptly in nature. There needn’t be an explanation. Then life resumes. The mystery and complexity of this is rendered with the hard stops of this painting, and rather than being disconnected, it allows this revelation to be conveyed.

This natural phenomena of rapid and cataclysmic change is also captured in other works such as “among the trees,” (oil on board, 20 x 15 inches, 2021) without containing any segmented features. The moment of transition from one state of being into another relies heavily on the spectrum of dark shades of color overlaid with softer elements. It ultimately represents chaos and transformation with a texture and visual language of watercolor. One senses that they are viewing riches, as well as emotional clues, but elusive ones.



Heichemer has spoken about the influence of the New Hampshire landscape where she now resides, particularly the phenomena of vernal pools which form as the winter’s ice melts, thus presenting ample visual material to draw upon. The pools are a form of puddle that forms as an indentation to the sunken landscape. Within these temporary ponds, Heichemer can see the regeneration and life cycle play out in a microcosm before her eyes. For several weeks, before the water dries up and evaporates, all sorts of animals and insects share the space. Life, color, death, deterioration all are happening. As the temperature rises, it’s a potpourri of activity: the laying of eggs, the fighting between species, the murmur of frogs and salamanders, amplified loudly by the vagaries of echo.

In “early morning dew” (oil on linen, 20 x 20 inches, 2021) Heichemer shows us that space isn’t finite in these paintings. The viewer can only approximate the full impact of the painting experience because so much continuing activity is suggested outside of the canvas composition. Here, one gets the sense that although the transitions are important and show a collision of color and form, that they are important for the evocation of experience. Therein lies the meaning of these paintings: they serve to guide the viewer through the experience of change. Certain nuances might evade memory, but the essence and critical experience, most certainly lingers. The mess that nature can make while in transition is the definition of seasonal change. Intense, it amplifies the age old adage that there is no permanence, not even for a single day.

Heichemer’s paintings convey freedom and possibility while paying homage to the natural world and the sensations she experiences and thereafter explores as an artist. One senses that Heichemer isn’t trying to fix a problem with her paintings, either. They are rooted in observational tendencies, although she allows the organic shapes and colors to convey, in tandem, the beauty and mutability of the natural world. In this way they code meanings beyond the typical making of an abstract, two-dimensional object. They are experiential records of close observation. One needn’t understand these paintings in any definitive sense to feel how Heichemer has captured the complexity of her natural surroundings. Heichemer reminds us that every moment contains multitudes. —*Matt Gonzalez*

Hollis Heichemer “Entanglement” on view through October 9, 2021, Hollis Taggart, 521 W. 26th Street, 1st Floor, New York City

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