

LAUREL SUCSY: CHASING THE RABBIT

2012 feb 24 — mar 30 clough-hanson gallery
rhodes college, memphis, tennessee



Laurel Sucsý's recent abstractions in her exhibition *Chasing the Rabbit* create a lush sense of illusionistic light and depth, reminiscent of the language of traditional landscapes. Each mark provides evidence of a deep understanding of the painting heroes of the past. She deftly combines mushy interlocking forms, like those found in Philip Guston's early abstractions, with an uncanny attention to color and surface, as seen in Giorgio Morandi's late still-lives. The canvases serve to document her daily practice of painting: being in the studio, listening to the paintings, and allowing them to find their own final forms.

The paintings are initiated with no particular agenda or idea of where they will end. Sucsý begins with what she describes as a "loose scaffolding of brush marks" which sets in motion what is to become a series of constant transformations.¹ Guided by intuition, one color is placed next to another creating a particular visual chord. These chords change in complexity and tone as the artist adds more colors, shapes, and surfaces. Their simple beginnings provide the material for the paintings to venture out in radically different directions. The artist describes how the intuitive process is similar to recognizing the beginnings of a personality in a young child: "Slowly their personalities begin to emerge; the trick is to try to nurture and encourage their spirit and let it be what it wants to be rather than trying to bend it to your idea of what it should be."²

A point of commonality for many of the paintings is a centrally placed cluster of activity. Art historian Katy Siegel writes that this kind of "central composition implies a human presence, a maker, someone who generates not neutral, all over fields, but worlds with perspective, hierarchies, and values."³ In Sucsý's *Dark* (2008), we see a cool, stony palette and the viewer's eye meanders around the irregular edges of the centralized locus, a lovely nugget of bundled, fractured space. One then follows the twists and turns of the richly colored facets inward as one might follow circuitous paths through a dense forest or down a rocky embankment. Along the way we encounter a variety of speeds and opacities in the layered painting as well as subtle shifts in the nuanced colors, creating a constantly shifting sense of deep and shallow spaces. In each of Sucsý's paintings, the point of entry for the interior space of the painting varies dramatically, depending on which section draws the viewer's eye first.

At times, as in *I Dream a Highway* (2012), the irregular borders of some of the patchwork sections are painted with similar techniques and colors that transition seamlessly from one to another. In other passages the juxtaposition of brusquely painted scumbled pigment, carefully layered opaque shapes, and supple wet-into-wet passages intentionally disrupt the rhythms established elsewhere in the painting. In Sucsý's complex series of call and response, spontaneous decisions accumulate to create a specific visceral resonance. In some, the changes can be subtle, as if the paintings are closely related or variations on a theme. Shifts among other paintings can be quite dramatic. The fastidious marks and cacophonous color combinations found in *Teeth in the Grass* (2012) create a dramatically different effect than one finds in the somber timbre established by the more reserved *Get Behind the Mule* (2012).

The carefully considered rich greys and mossy greens paired with the bending, broken sense of atmospheric space point to the thread of emotional reserve that runs through Laurel Sucsý's thoughtfully realized paintings. Her intuitive process allows the artist to use the medium of painting to create attentive, yet challenging paintings. The paintings in turn serve to record the artist's decisions along the way, documenting her specific temperament, her nuanced emotional landscape, during the process. Through her canvases we see her nudging a shape, refining a hue, negotiating and navigating ways of creating an invented, abstract world that offers a real sense of space. These paintings provide the sense of discovery and share the artist's wonder as something powerful and real is slowly unearthed.

Hamlett Dobbins
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

¹During a studio visit with the artist on February 10, 2012.

²Ibid

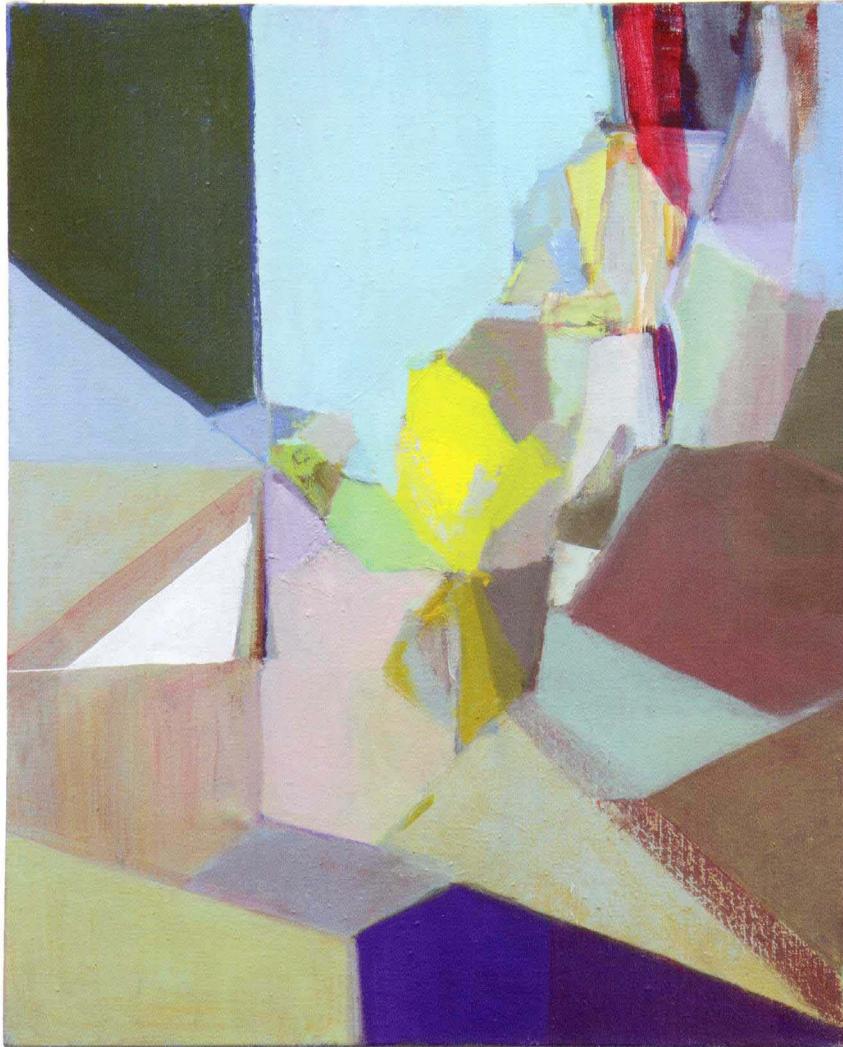
³Sussman, Elisabeth, Caroline A. Jones, and Katy Siegel. *Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Painting and Drawing*. New York NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2005. 98. Print.

Flap: *Get Behind the Mule*, 2012
Inside right: *Teeth in the Grass*, 2012
Back: *Morning Mr. Magpie*, 2012
Cover: *I Dream a Highway*, 2012
Inside left: *Dark*, 2008

All images oil on linen, 20" x 16" and are courtesy the artist and John Davis Gallery, Hudson, New York







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