



Solace / Sublime

Angels Gate Cultural Center

Solace / Sublime

July 8 — September 16, 2023

Curated by Molly Enholm Velazco

Samantha Fields / Megan Frances / Virginia Katz
Yvette Gellis / R. Nelson Parrish / Molly Enholm Velazco



Angels Gate Cultural Center (AGCC) emerged from a group of San Pedro artists in the 1970s who made artist studios out of the unoccupied WWII-era army barracks on the now decommissioned Fort MacArthur military base. Located in Angels Gate Park near the Port of Los Angeles, today AGCC serves as a local cultural hub – providing a platform for connections between the arts and community. A nonprofit organization, the Center hosts a public art gallery and over 50 artist studios, in addition to a variety of programs that engage the diverse communities of the Los Angeles Harbor region including arts education in local schools, community classes, cultural events, and exhibitions of contemporary art.

angelsgateart.org

Virginia Katz
Precipice (detail), 2022,
Monoprint on Paper,
67 x 37 inches.

Curatorial Essay by Molly Enholm Velazco

*Dedicated to my dad and our
many drives through the desert.*

Solace / Sublime is inspired by the belief that the landscape, and artworks inspired by it, can provide an aura of solace as well as conjure the grand notions of the sublime. The participating artists each look to the natural world for inspiration, often using their art to address their concern for the precarious state of the environment today. These themes are inherently woven into the fabric of this exhibition. For me, this is also an incredibly personal show, reconciling through art my own experience of finding solace in long drives through the barren desert landscape while caring for my father in the last year of his life. Turning to the act of collaboration provided the wondrous opportunity to work with artists I've long admired and learned from to expand on this solitary experience and explore the ability of art to provide profound revelations, both cathartic and transcendent.

As such, the exhibition is organized as a metaphoric journey—both physical and emotional—of finding solace through the sublimity of the natural world. Upon entering the gallery, this journey begins with a series of large-scale monoprints by Virginia Katz, vertical portals, so to speak, that seem to offer passage into another dimension. The changing horizon line between them suggests an elusive and ever-changing notion of destination while evoking nature's enduring rhythms, such as the phases of the moon or changing tides of the sea. These works are in dialogue with a pair of large-scale paintings by Samantha Fields, one capturing an endless stretch of the I-40 Interstate crossing an expanse of the Texas plains, with towering windmills eclipsed by threatening storm clouds evoking the vast scale of nature's sublime. The second, titled *Mysterium Tremendum* ("awe-inspiring mystery"), takes inspiration from the writings of Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto and his exploration of the numinous—an unexplainable experience of mysterious awe, a sort of spiritual sublime. Fields' painting quite literally grapples with the duality of solace and sublime, as darkened windswept clouds background a torrent of rain over a darkened landscape. The tremendous is offset with the lyrical, as the half-arc of a rainbow connects the earth and heavens creating a sense of sanctuary within the storm.

A single enigmatic sculpture, *Cody to Yellowstone*, by R. Nelson Parrish hangs just off-center between these two bodies of work. A tall, inverted wedge hangs from the ceiling composed of a slender wooden flitch enveloped in semi-translucent layers of bio-resin tinted with white and blue pigments. The work is suspended over an irregularly shaped rock that vaguely echoes the silhouette of a distant mountain range, an homage to roads less traveled. The combined materials evoke the four classical elements—air, earth, fire, and water—and the powerful forces that underlie the cyclical processes of nature. Yet, there is an equal air of fragility in the arrangement, as the clear edge of the flitch hangs precariously over the rugged stone adding an underlying sense of tension to the work.

Framing the transition between the two galleries is a pair of three-dimensional works by Virginia Katz. In contrast to the atmospheric monoprints that pull our attention to a nearly imperceptible offering, the densely layered relief sculptures project from the wall, mimicking overgrown branches of dry and lush foliage interwoven through scraps of metal fencing. Evoking the cycles of nature, these *trompe l'oeil* sculptures portray the kind of forgotten vines weaving their way through fragments of chain-link fence that one might find framing an abandoned parking lot or forgotten stretch of highway. The perseverance of nature is inherently evoked, as in Thomas Cole's climatic work, *Desolation*, in his famous *Course of Empire* series (1833-36), albeit in more contemporary terms. Katz effectively creates a time capsule that preserves what is, perhaps, among the most unmistakable evidence of nature's sublime endurance in our own time: its tenacious adaptability in surviving humanity's industrial debris.

The journey continues through the exuberant canvases of Megan Frances, in which the artist paints geometric forms that intertwine the printed floral motifs in the found textiles that she both employs and upends. While the hard edge and imperceptible brushwork of Frances's meticulous technique becomes nearly indistinguishable from the material upon which she works, these painted interventions are paramount as they instill a sense of depth and momentum in the otherwise flat patterns of the printed material—the kind one might find covering the walls of some kitschy roadside inn. The transformation begins with an expanded color scheme, culled from the shadows and highlights of the synthetic leaves and fronds of the fabric. These colors and their complements take shape in the arched forms and vertical passages interrupting the once monotonous manufactured repetitions, allowing the eye to rediscover beauty, an aspect once linked with the sublime experience, within the overlapping botanical forms.

The earthy materiality of Frances's explorations is offset by a series of paintings by Parrish arranged with a direct nod to Robert Irwin's ethereal installation, titled *1°2°3°4°*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, as it challenges one to similarly engage with an exploration of space, time, and perception. The series of Nelson's painted windows, so to speak, create the illusion of a cloud-filled sky, interrupted only by the flash of pink, orange, and reflected iridescence in the hanging sculptural flitch titled *Susitna*, named after a luminous mountain known for reflecting a prismatic array of hues from the evening light



Installation view, Samantha Fields and R. Nelson Parrish.



Installation view, Megan Frances and Virginia Katz.



when blanketed in snow. This evokes, with its striking verticality, the mysterious *Winter Landscape* by the 15th-century Japanese Zen monk / painter Sesshū Tōyō. Though miles apart conceptually, each work challenges one to re-see a familiar landscape, with the Zen master conjuring the notion of instant enlightenment, a sublime experience if ever there was one, through a similarly radical disjuncture in the form of a vertical brushstroke that disrupts the painted landscape.

Anchoring the back room is a pair of monumental paintings on unframed canvas by Yvette Gellis, nearly covering the entirety of the back wall and rolling ever so slightly onto the floor into the space of the viewer. This breaking of the fourth wall is amplified by the installation of a driftwood and mixed-media assemblage that echoes the artist's powerful linework and pulls it forward into the realm of the gallery. The paintings behind reverberate with the artist's gestural brushwork in vibrant shades of violet, emerald-green, and yellow used to portray the intertwined branches and hanging fruit pods of the Tamala Tree, a medical plant in India held to be symbolic of the great love shared by Radha and Krishna. The paintings by Gellis, *Leaves of Remembrance I & II*, were inspired by this compelling symbolism and her experience of traveling to India, walking through the sacred trees. The installation is bracketed by two works on paper that verge on pure abstraction as they portray the twisting trunks of birch trees that reach far beyond the confines of the rectangular picture plane. Collectively, these painted works create an immersive space of contemplation and solace for the viewer, as they evoke the forests that inspired them.

Turning the corner past Gellis's paintings are my own works, from which the origin of the show's thesis emerged. A trio of paintings portrays the mountains and skies yet create a dislocated sense of place tinged with anxiety, ever seeking resolution through the dripping layers and washes of paint. The dissonance of these painted landscapes contrasts with a series of more recent works: distilled, desaturated color fields preserving the faded memories of those long drives across the Mojave through minimalist portraits of the

desert sky. A single larger work, offset from both collections, evokes the hour past twilight when all the brilliant shades of pink, orange, and purple have fled, and only gradients of blue remain, growing ever deeper as stars begin to emerge from their daytime slumber to offer glints of light, of solace, against the darkening heavens.

Moving back into the front gallery, our attention is drawn toward a pair of paintings, *Faded Out By The Sun* and *Heat Wave*, by Samantha Fields on the facing wall. Upon approach, the warmth of the sunlight that flickers through the hills, trees, and powerlines is nearly palpable. The bright light of the sun beckons the viewer ever closer and, like the monoprints by Katz, seems to offer a window to another dimensional plane. The journey concludes with this reminder that such transcendental encounters with nature can exist even in the most mundane of circumstances.

Against the backdrop of a nascent Industrial Revolution, notions of the sublime re-emerged in the 18th century as poets and painters embraced the glory and inherent beauty of the natural world in deliberate contrast to an increasingly bleak urban reality. As it evolved in the Romantic era, through the philosophical writings of Burke, Kant and others, artists responded, and the preoccupation with the sublime became isolated from earlier emotional ties and turned to representations of awesome, and sometimes exaggerated, expressions of nature's might and fury. This exhibition is arranged to challenge this dislocation and reconsider the relationship between the concepts of solace and sublime as intertwined and interdependent rather than existing in a state of opposition. The ephemeral beauty of nature and its comforting solace, as in those desert twilights, is equally sublime in its transience that quickly evaporates into darkness. As industrial and technological intrusions into the landscape increasingly mediate our experiences of nature, we can perhaps take cues from artists, past and present, in recognizing the capacity of the natural world, and the art it inspires, to provide the human soul with experiences of solace and sublime.

Samantha Fields

Samantha Fields recontextualizes traditional landscape painting to reflect upon present-day challenges and looming threats of catastrophic climate change. Working from photographs taken during her travels—ranging from a simple morning walk to a cross-country drive—Fields documents the ongoing daily evidence that increasingly points to an unavoidable apocalyptic future. Her works are in stark contrast to the devastating images of severe weather conditions that typically bombard the media. Instead of portraying the shattering aftermath of such events, Fields composes rich, luminous landscapes that depict the now all-too-familiar heat waves, tornadoes, lighting, and firestorms based on her own personal experiences. She translates these occurrences through paintings that inspire the classical sublime reinvigorated with this contemporary context: a sense of awe in the natural world infused with the man-made afflictions that plague the contemporary landscape.



A Voice in the Wilderness, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 55 x 82 inches.



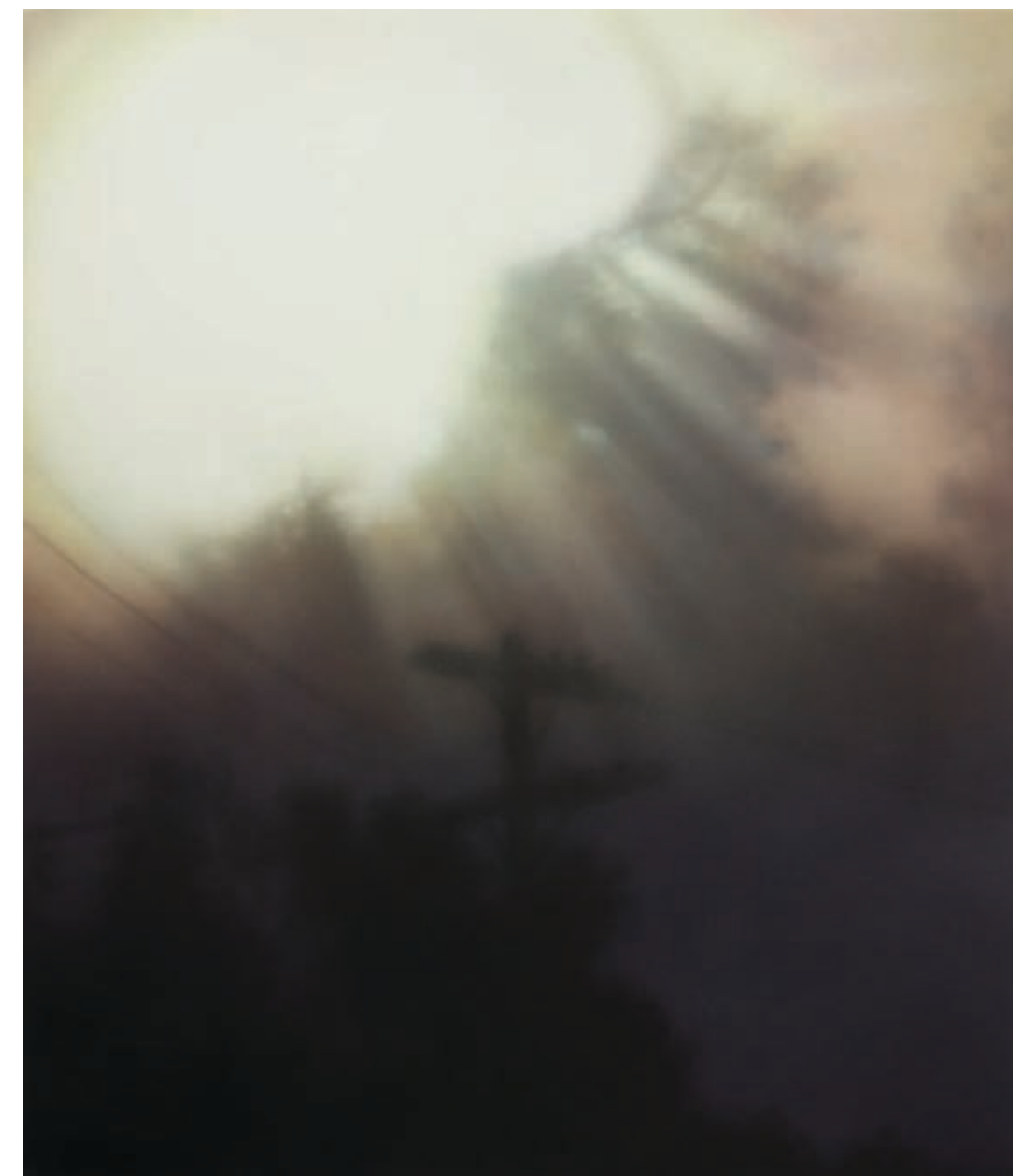
Mysterium Tremendum, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 inches.



Installation view,
Samantha Fields and
R. Nelson Parrish.



Heat Wave, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 42 x 36 inches.



Faded Out By The Sun, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 42 x 36 inches.

Megan Frances

In her current series, *Canopy of Dreams*, Megan Frances pays homage to the natural world, while alluding to humanity's destructive impact on it. Inspired by her experience of living in the Bahamas during her formative years, these works are painted on found printed textile which Frances has appropriated as a ground in lieu of using a conventional surface. In her formal compositional interventions, the artist's aggressive hard-edge painted curvilinear elements intertwine both in harmony and contrast with the botanical motifs in the background – repeated patterns of stylized flora reminiscent of lost or threatened environments, like the lush, canopied subtropical landscapes of the islands. Through the push and pull of this orchestrated visual dialogue, Frances extols the fragility and beauty of nature, seeking to preserve it, if only through her symbolic gesture.

Subtropical Tangle I & II (detail), 2020,
Acrylic on found textile (diptych),
48 x 60 inches.

Solace / Sublime



Megan Frances

13



Subtropical Tangle I & II, 2020, Acrylic on found textile (diptych), 48 x 60 inches.



Stems + Fronds, 2023, Acrylic on found textile, 24-inch diameter.



Sunset, 2021, Acrylic on found textile, 32 x 40 inches.



Banana Grove in Dappled Light, 2019, Acrylic on found textile, 32 x 40 inches.

Yvette Gellis

Yvette Gellis' large-scale, immersive landscape paintings find inspiration in the architectural structure of the natural environment. She fractures the traditional sense of space with a distorted perspective, combining representational elements offset with bold, gestural brushwork that accentuates both the subject and painted surface creating a harmonious relationship between these differing modes of artistic expression. Using sculptural forms to further expand her painting into the third dimension symbolizes a spiritual transition that transcends the physical world. In these works, the drifting leaves, flora, and woodlands resonate with writings of Thoreau, who in *Solitude* asked of his readers, "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth?" Placing emphasis on the intricate layers of these natural forms, the artist symbolically references her belief in the interconnectedness between all of life and the natural world, igniting hope that the future may yet promise a better world.

Fields of Remembrance II (detail), 2023,
Oil, acrylic, and graphite
on unframed canvas,
117 x 84 inches.



Fields of Remembrance I, 2023,
Oil, acrylic, and graphite
on unframed canvas,
117 x 84 inches.



Fields of Remembrance II, 2023,
Oil, acrylic, and graphite
on unframed canvas,
117 x 84 inches.



Left: *Drifting I*, 2023,
Oil and acrylic on paper,
77 x 40 inches.

Above: *Drifting II*, 2023,
Oil and acrylic on paper,
40 x 23 inches.



Drifting III, 2023, Driftwood, Mylar, leaf, and oil paint, 33 x 28 x 72 inches.

Virginia Katz

Ephemeral cycles of the natural world are given visual form in the art of Virginia Katz. Underpinned by philosophical inquiry, Katz's choices of media, imagery, and process-based techniques emphasize a shared and entangled relationship with the environment and the full participation of humanity in the cyclical processes of decay and renewal. The shifting horizon line and texturized color fields in her large-scale monoprints are symbolic of the ongoing shifts and changes in the relationship between humanity and landscape. Composed of thick acrylic paint formed by hand, the relief paintings extend the traditionally two-dimensional landscape painting genre into three-dimensions while mirroring the complex human/nature relationship using art as a metaphor for our coexistence. Collectively, these still-life reliefs and minimalist landscapes focus on the environment and equate an allegorical connection with its states of flux, upheaval, and regeneration.

*Symbiosis (detail), 2020,
Acrylic paint formed by
hand and integrated on
panel with wire and fencing,
35 x 40 x 9.5 inches.*

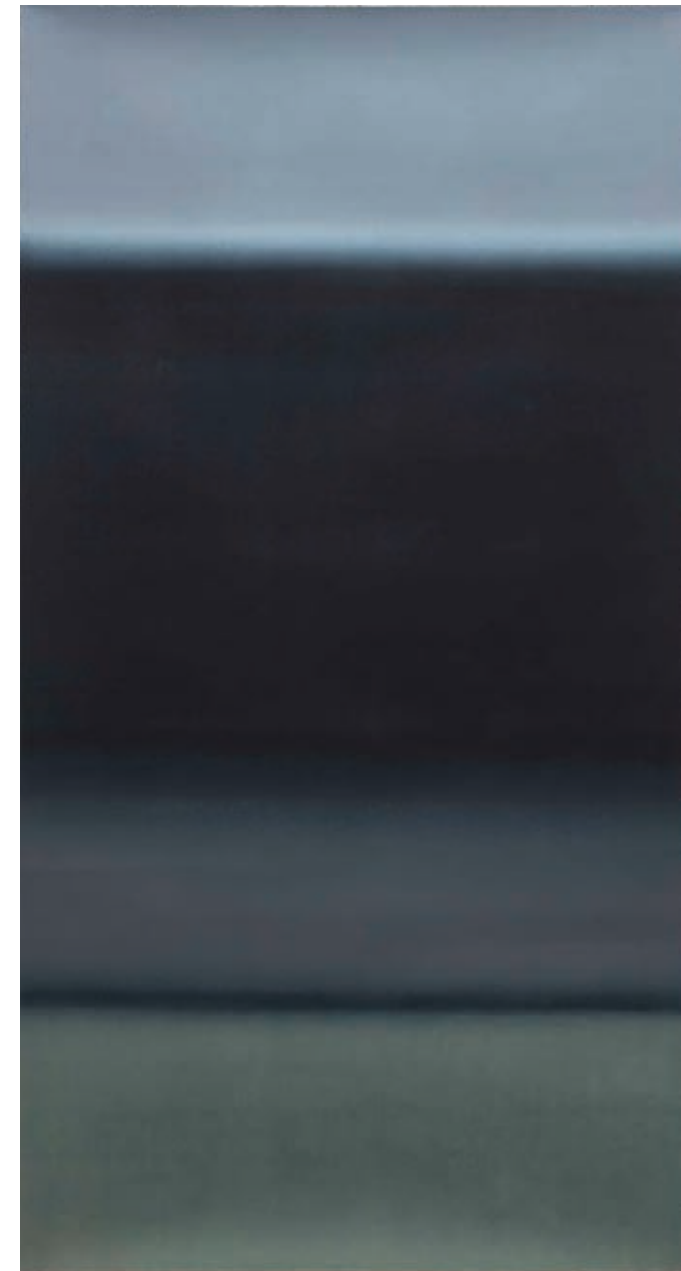




Symbiosis, 2020, Acrylic paint formed by hand and integrated on panel with wire and fencing, 35 x 40 x 9.5 inches.



Remains, 2020-2021, Acrylic paint formed by hand and integrated on panel with wire and fencing, 25 x 34 x 7 inches.



Left to right:

The Hours—Dusk, 2020,
Monoprint on paper,
67 x 37 inches.

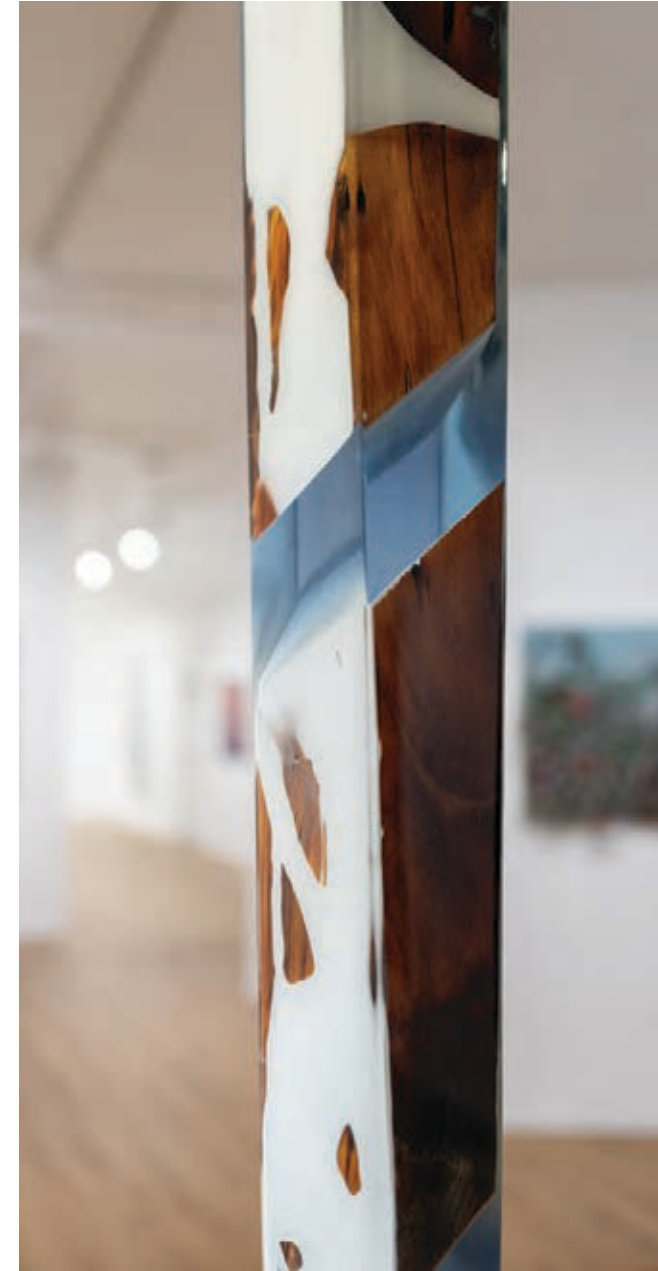
Precipice, 2022,
Monoprint on paper,
67 x 37 inches.

Approaching Threat, 2022,
Monoprint on paper,
67 x 37 inches.

R. Nelson Parrish

Alaskan-born R. Nelson Parrish draws upon lived experiences in the natural world as key sources of inspiration in his mixed-media sculptures and paintings. Long interested in photography, Parrish frames his practice in terms of capturing the essence of a moment suspended in time, albeit in abstract terms. Parrish draws upon fragmented memories of visceral activity and engagement with the landscape—skiing, surfing, and open-water swimming—and the heightened sense of focus that occurs while navigating the often-tumultuous terrain. The result of this engagement is an all-pervading sensation of calm, of taking solace, amidst the intense grandeur of the natural environment. Using his body as a recording device, the artist translates the emotional synergy of these moments through the melding of disparate materials, including pigments, bio-resin, and reclaimed wood. Blurring the boundaries of natural and synthetic, Parrish captures the complex entangled realities of the contemporary landscape.

Cody to Yellowstone, 2019,
Color, bio-resin, and reclaimed wood,
87.75 x 3.75 x 3.25 inches.

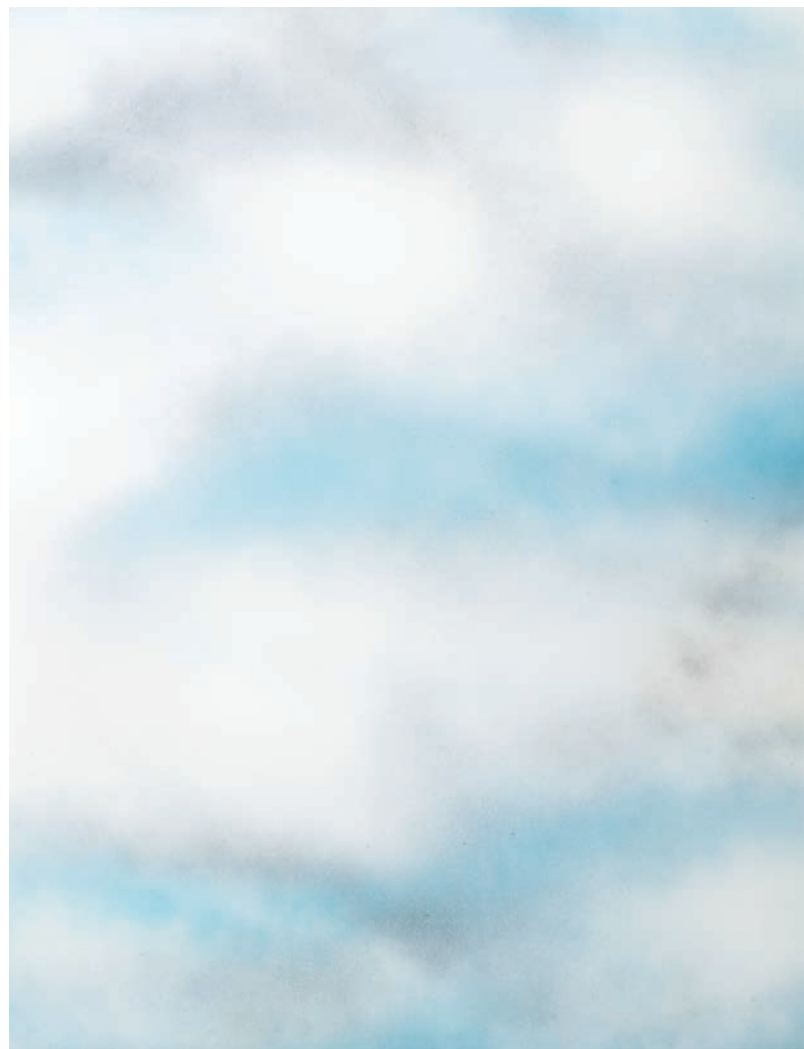




Susitna, 2018,
Color, bio-resin, and reclaimed wood,
48 x 5 x 5 inches.

Right: Installation view
Susitna and *Big Dreams* series.





Big Dreams V, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive
clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 14 inches.



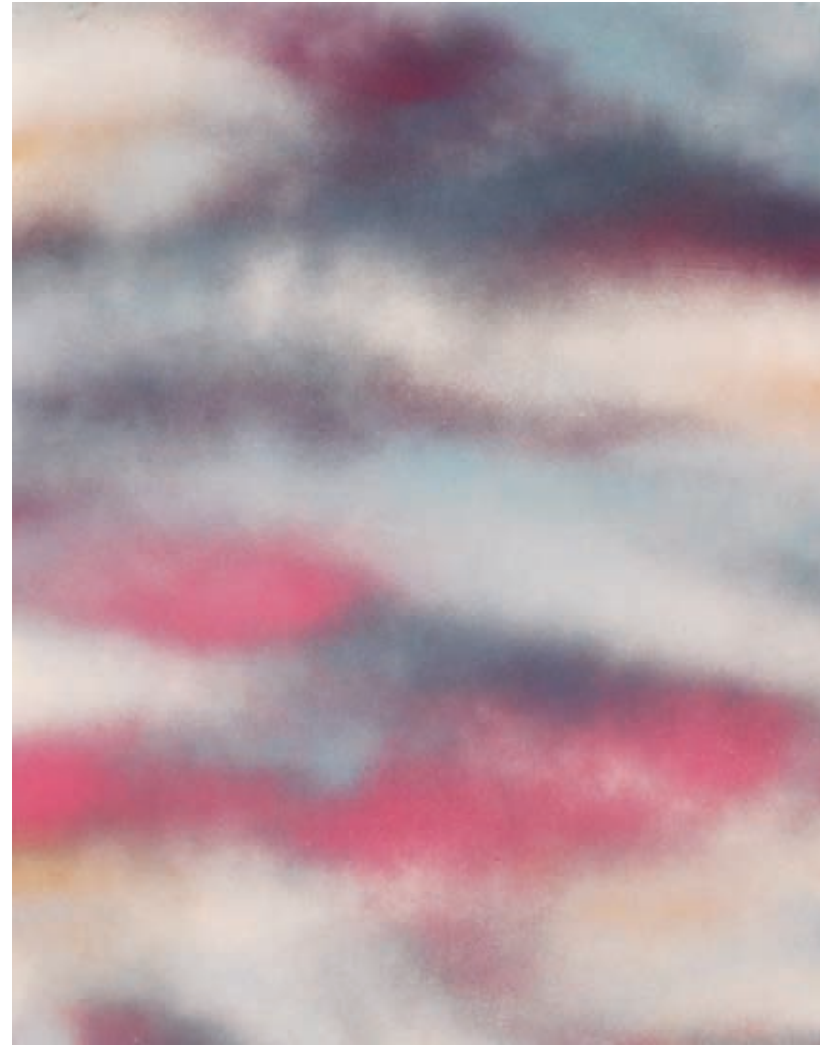
Big Dreams VIII, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive
clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 14 inches.



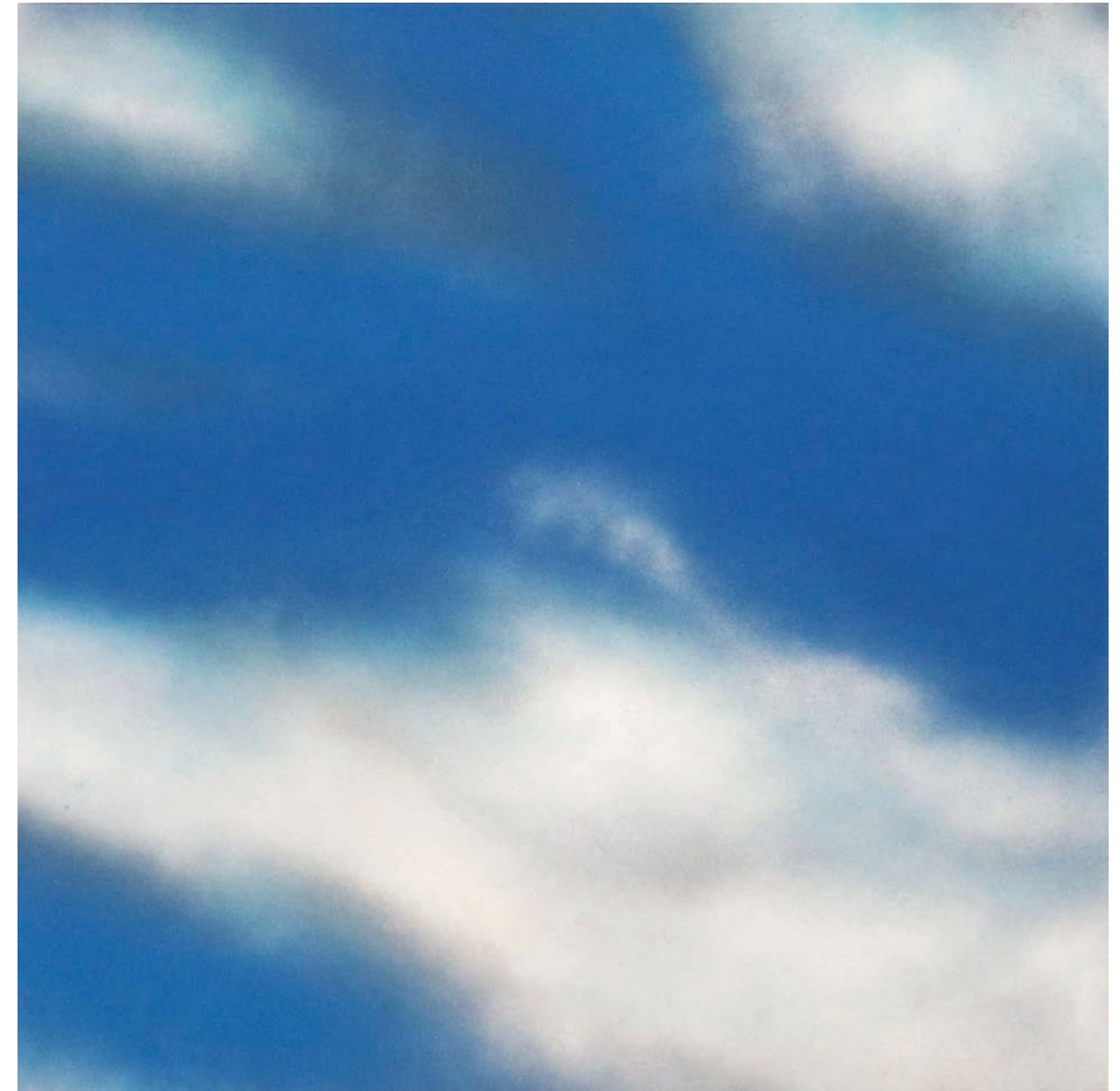
Big Dreams II, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive
clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 14 inches.



Big Dreams VI, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive
clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 14 inches.



Big Dreams IV, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive
clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 14 inches.



Big Dreams X, 2023,
Synthetic polymer, automotive clearcoat on wooden panel,
18 x 18 inches.

Molly Enholm Velazco

The desert landscape serves as a primary influence for the current paintings of Molly Enholm Velazco. She explores this inspiration through a color palette distilled from memories of long drives through the Mojave Desert, with abstract images based on recollections of shapes and patterns made by the clouds, mountains and sparse vegetation that accompanied these travels. The paintings are also indebted to historical precedents and inspirations ranging from theories of the sublime to the pictorial innovations of icons such as Helen Frankenthaler and Mary Corse. Seeking to create a sense of resolution between opposing forces of calm and chaos, the artist culls images from layered washes of paint and iridescent media built on the raw, unprimed weave of the canvas. She describes this process as an ongoing art of negotiation, as the meditative action of painting offers a way back to reclaim the quiet moments of these past journeys.

Desert Highway, 2020,
Acrylic on unprimed canvas (diptych),
36 x 36 inches.





Evening Rain, 2020-2021, Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 30 x 24 inches.



Desert Palette (Big Blue Skies), 2023, Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 30 x 30 inches.



Electric Sunset, 2020-2021,
Acrylic on unprimed canvas,
48 x 36 inches.





Desert Palette Series
 Top, from left: *Winter Solstice*, *Winter Haze*, *Morning Clouds*
 Bottom, from left: *Afternoon Drive North*, *October Sky*, *Twilight*
 Opposite: *Fiery Sunset (Fanta Orange)*
 All works: 2023, Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 10 x 10 inches.



Front and back cover: Photo credit Jordan Rodriguez.

Page ii: Photo credit Gene Ogami, courtesy of the artist.

Page 1: Photo by Molly Enholm Velazco.

Samantha Fields

Pages 7-10: Images courtesy of the artist.

Page 11: Photo credit Jose Cordon.

Megan Frances

Pages 14, 16: Photo credit Rick Friesen, courtesy of the artist.

Page 15: Image courtesy of the artist.

Pages 13, 17: Photo credit Jordan Rodriguez.

Yvette Gellis

Pages 19-21: Images courtesy of the artist.

Pages 22, 23: Photo credit Jordan Rodriguez.

Works courtesy of LA Louver Gallery and the artist.

Virginia Katz

Pages 25-27: Photo credit Jordan Rodriguez.

Pages 0, 28, 29: Photo credit Gene Omagi, courtesy of the artist.

R. Nelson Parrish

Pages 31 (left), 33: Photo credit Jordan Rodriguez.

Pages 31 (right), 32, 34-37: Photo credit Jonas Jungblut, courtesy of the artist.

Molly Enholm Velazco

Page 39, 42: Photos credit Jordan Rodriguez.

40, 41, 43-45: Images courtesy of the artist.

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