

THE FUTURE IS LIQUID

(a solo exhibition at Space Gallery, Denver; June 2018)

Essay by David Masello

Monroe Hodder knows when she has finished one of her canvases. As she says, “When the mood is more in the canvas than it is in me, I know I’m done.”

The viewer, however, of one of her large-scale canvases, particularly these ten new ones that comprise her “Wilderness Series,” is never done seeing things or ever tires of looking. Using her signature build-up of multiple layers of paint, Hodder engages viewers through her colors, forms, textures and a flirtation back and forth between what seems to be foreground but what later appears as background. Every one of these works, in addition to the two dozen drawings she includes in the show, along with an installation piece, is so dense with hue and layering, so multi-dimensional, that each painting assumes a sense of animation. What is on canvas appears to be in motion almost as if it were a space of flowing liquid.

Hodder says that the impetus for this new series was both a change of location and a change of heart. She and her husband moved from a remote, mountainous region of Colorado to resettle in a farmhouse in the Hudson River Valley. The resulting emotional upheaval caused her to rethink her approach to her work. While she maintains a studio in midtown Manhattan, as well as her residence in Nyack, New York, she feels deeply about the loss of the Colorado wilderness.

But she has found her way to a new locale, on canvas. Prior to this series, Hodder had been producing works characterized by a thick impasto of oil paint in a fixed geometry. Here, though, she begins with a quadrant grid, which she immediately alters with movements of paint in every direction—diagonal, horizontal, vertical, backwards, forward.

“For these new works, lines are made by delicately pouring paint,” she says, “with an intent to create canvases that are thinner and more luminous.” While she has always used a variety of materials to apply the paint, certainly brushes, along with her palms and fingers, here she also makes use of wedges of corrugated cardboard, raked across the wet paint. This material and the way she uses it results in entrancing rhythmic crescents and sweeps. “I tend to work in a flurry of activity,” she admits, “and while I create matrices, I’ve purposefully bent them here. It’s a deliberate distortion of order. It’s about seeing the world through the lens of our time, a chaotic and disorienting one.

Hodder’s canvases are as complex as poems; their meanings continue to deepen the longer one looks. Even her titles hearken to poetry—*Labyrinths and Mirrors, Snow Over Sun, Flame Into Fire, On Stellar Rays, Already and Not Yet.*

She claims she never knows where she is going while working on a painting, yet she always finds her way to a destination amid the wilderness of creativity, to a place where both she and the viewer are content to remain.

*David Masello is a noted essayist and cultural writer, based in New York.
davidmasello.com*

