

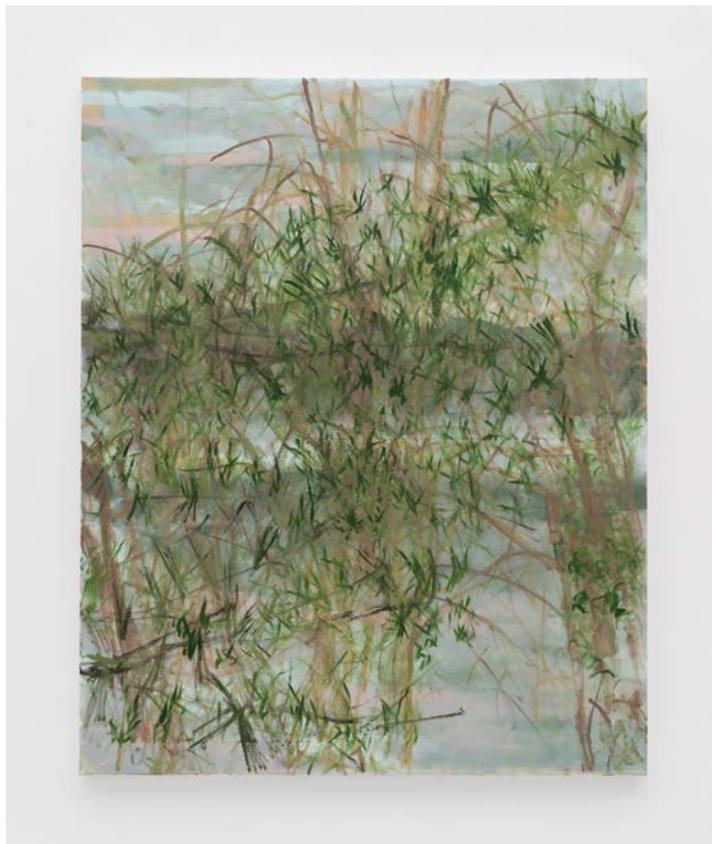
TWO COATS OF PAINT

Award-winning blogazine, primarily about painting

GALLERY SHOWS

The feeling of order: Helen Frankenthaler, Trevor Shimizu, and Wallace Stevens

April 26, 2023



Trevor Shimizu, Hudson River Winter 2023, 2023 oil on canvas 52 × 49 in (132.08 × 124.46 cm) Image courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York Photo: Joerg Lohse

Contributed by Elizabeth Scheer / As the city transitions into solstitial warmth, two stand-out exhibitions reward the corresponding sense of emergence. **Helen Frankenthaler’s “Drawing within Nature: Paintings from the 1990s,”** on view at Gagosian, and **Trevor Shimizu’s “Cycles”** at 47 Canal are preoccupied with what the American poet **Wallace Stevens** described in his poem “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” as the discovery of “order as of a season.” Both exhibitions feature pastoral scenes that impressionistically use color, texture, and line to reveal patterns in the apparent arbitrariness of the natural elements they aim to represent.

Stevens is a kindred spirit of both Frankenthaler and Shimizu. A landscapist of inner weather, Stevens reflects on direct experience, developing enigmatic scenes whose moods oscillate between ebullience and sparseness as he hunts for a spiritual framework that accounts for both the beauty and the desolation of the sensual world. In his view, order is to be “discover[ed]” rather than “impos[ed].”

But to impose is not
To discover. To discover an order as of
A season, to discover summer and know it,
To discover winter and know it well, to find,
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
Out of nothing to have come on major weather,
It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible.

For Stevens, art finds rather than enforces order and is therefore an act of integration: a pairing of one's internal landscape with the external world. We paradoxically crave security as well as transformation, and a season furnishes both by way of the solace of a repeated pattern (spring, summer, fall, winter) and the promise of its inevitable change, as each season gives way to a new one.

Frankenthaler's twelve paintings and two large-scale works on paper reflect the same desire for order in the sense of a season. Striking a balance between variance and repetition, these Color Field works feature soak-stained techniques, scratch marks, and dense splatters of color that articulate moods that both seep in and scuttle away, demonstrating motion within fixity, as passing weather does. Like Stevens, Frankenthaler projects abstract climates. She once said:

My pictures are full of climates, abstract climates, and not nature per se. But a feeling. And the feeling of an order that is associated more with nature. Nature in seasons, maybe; but nature in, well, an order. And I think art itself is order out of chaos.

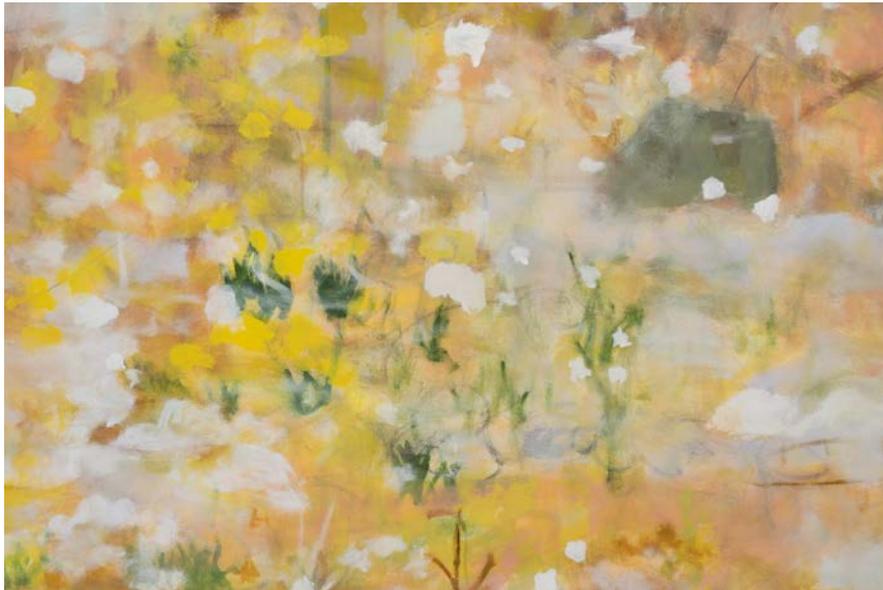
One of the pleasures of Frankenthaler's work is its expansive visual logic, which liberates the viewer to discover the "feeling of an order" within its multilayered surfaces. In *Stella Polaris*, a string of crimson brush marks crawl, caterpillar-like, along the work's base, visually rhyming with a faint magenta stain at the top of the painting. In *Western Roadmap*, a floating band of tangerine approximates sand or sun, garnished by wet-on-wet splotches of dirty white strewn across the work like tumbleweed. As the title suggest, the work registers more as a prompt for a feeling than the feeling itself. The paintings visually capture the dynamism of a season in transition while also holding the viewer with their internal harmony.



Trevor Shimizu, Plum Blossoms, 2022 oil on canvas 52 7/8 x 66 3/4 in (134.30 x 169.55 cm) Image courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York Photo: Joerg Lohse

Trevor Shimizu's work has a similar rhythm. A forerunner of contemporary impressionism, Shimizu was originally known for playing with comical archetypes like the disgruntled assistant and the harried father. In his early work, he alternately embraces and discards these characters, evoking a shifting "feeling of order." In the current show, however, Shimizu has jettisoned these themes and produced a series of extraordinary landscapes that trace the passage of time through a garden's changing backdrop. Working from memory, Shimizu's spartan brushstrokes and raucous outlines produce riotous natural scenes that recall the Hudson River School with the roving, irreverent energy of a rock musician – which, as a teenager, the artist aspired to be. In *November-December 2022*, for example, Creamsicle-colored light spills between petal-like splotches and looping curls of green, creating a dazzling scene that pulsates with the onset of spring. Throughout Shimizu's work, taped-off edges and exposed stretcher bars signal motion within stillness, suggesting a natural cycle of intake and fallout, absorption and dissolution.

Preoccupied with the relationship between inner and outer weather, both artists manifest an aesthetic dedication to nature even as they push the boundaries of landscape. They understand that while we can't will a new season, being at its mercy initiates our recalibration; we grow in response to it. This fundamental reciprocity between nature and the mind is at the heart of both Frankenthaler and Shimizu's work, and richly informs their search for "major weather."



Trevor Shimizu, November-December 2022, 2023 (detail)
oil on canvas
93 x 190 7/8 in (236.22 x 484.82 cm)