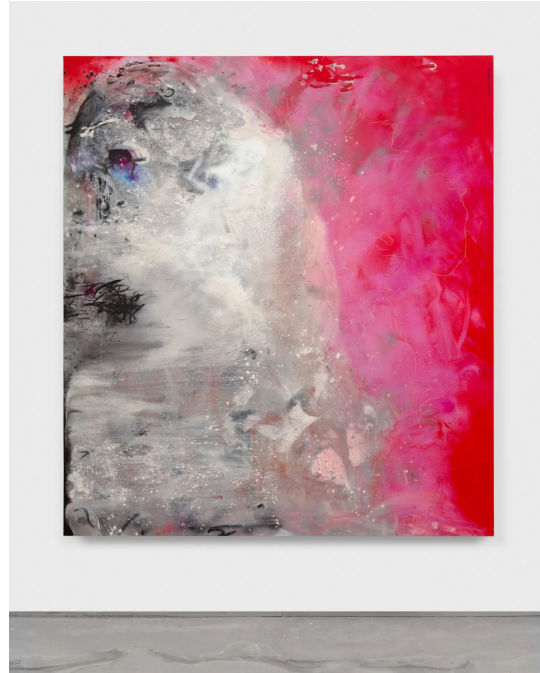


HYPERALLERGIC



Installation view of Suzanne McClelland, "GHOST at Dusk-Sybil's Retreat" (2024), mixed media on canvas, 84 x 75 inches (all images courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery)

THE ADROIT FORMALISM OF SUZANNE MCCLELLAND

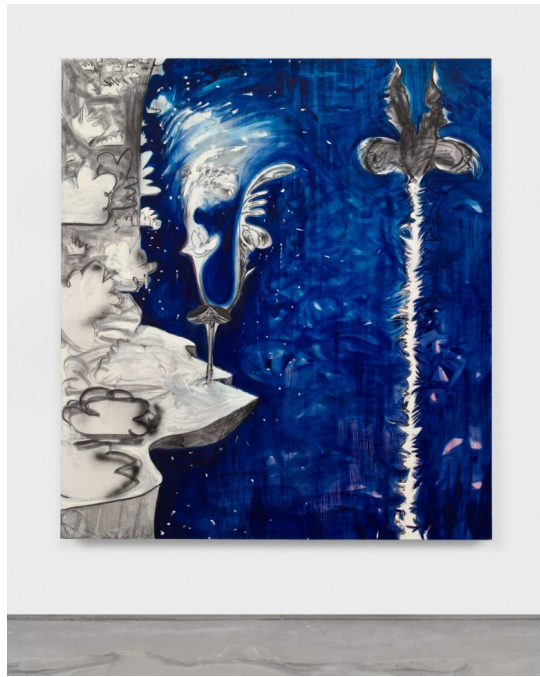
BY LEAH TRIPLETT HARRINGTON
May 21, 2024

Her paintings become even more visceral when set against her cerebral symbolism.

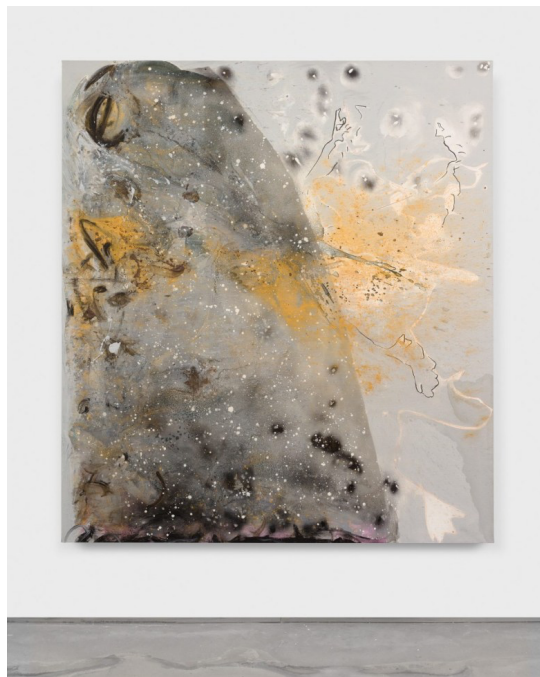
Suzanne McClelland has been fixated on the gaps between language, perception, and understanding for decades now, beginning in the 1990s. [Highland Seer](#), the artist's second exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery, extends her explorations of this theme. These 13 paintings, all from this year, are urgent yet subtle rejoinders to look closely.

Highland Seer takes its title from the pseudonymous Scottish writer of 1920's [Reading Tea Leaves](#), A Highland Seer. This short volume of verse explains how to find meaning in leaves, shapes, and premonitions, offering readers a means to interpret the present and predict the future. McClelland likewise suggests close looking and listening to read between sign and rhetoric in this exhibition. Each painting offers small clues to puzzle out larger patterns, such as looping, gestural abstraction that obliquely figures numbers, or distorted but familiar symbols, like the cartoon character the Road Runner, seen specifically in works such as "PREY – (heads or tails)" and "PREY – (tails or heads)."

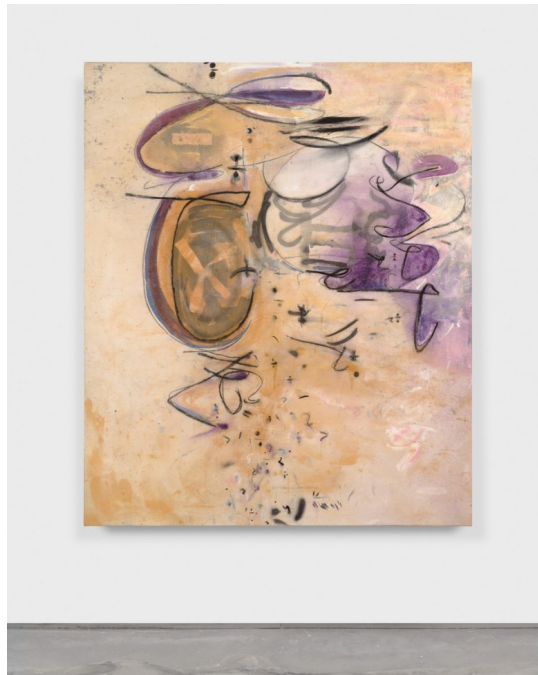
More so than these figurative cues, however, meaning is truly mediated in these paintings through the slow, attentive considerations of large passages of intertwined color and form. For instance, the title of the black, ruby red, white, and gray "Blind Contour-Why do you Wait in the Shadowy Marshes?," the first painting to the left upon entering the gallery, impels one to search for a face, which does indeed materialize in the upper portion of the canvas. But the face becomes bodily as McClelland's washes of paint texturize into a bubbly, skin-like texture. The painting assumes a sense of physicality not from the artist's supple use of symbol but rather from her adroit formalism, which becomes even more visceral when set against her cerebral symbolism.



Installation view of Suzanne McClelland, "PREY (heads or tails)" (2024), charcoal and oil on canvas, 84 x 72 inches



Installation view of Suzanne McClelland, "GHOST at Dawn-Sybil's Retreat" (2024), mixed media on canvas, 84 x 75 inches

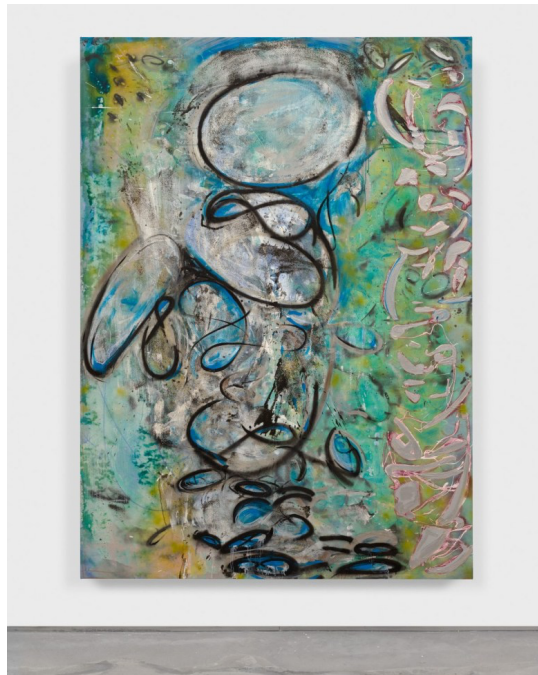


Suzanne McClelland, "2dividedby2 pleinair" (2024), water-based paint and charcoal on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

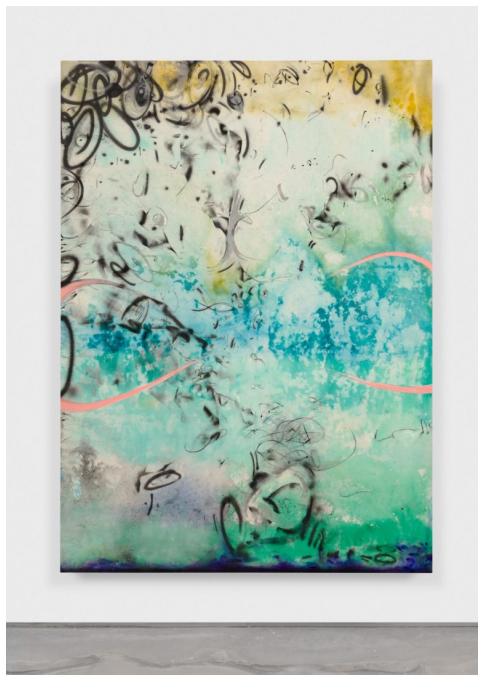
The idea that something only takes full shape and meaning juxtaposed with something else is extended in works like "GHOST at Dawn-Sybil's Retreat" and "GHOST at Dusk-Sybil's Retreat," which are installed along the gallery's long left wall. Both pieces feature sloping heaps in their left corners — something that, by nature, cannot be reduced, only taking shape via accumulation. By including these heaps — and specific times of day — McClelland acknowledges that meaning relies on perception and context, in a nod to the haystacks of Monet.

Place and time, and how these intersect in our perception, are of particular importance to a grouping of works indicated with "pleinair" in the title, many of which were made outside. To create these works, McClelland laid unstretched canvas directly onto gravel before pouring paint over, leading to textured surfaces that reveal their setting and process of making. Place, therefore, becomes indistinguishable from the formal properties of these works.

Setting is paramount to the pieces contained in the cloistered space at the back of the gallery. Three large-scale paintings, each titled "Infinity's Twin" appended with elements such as "earth," allude to the vastness of the natural world. These works do indeed overwhelm when installed so tightly together in this small anteroom, but their richness of color, shape, and texture demands close attention nonetheless. It's then that individual splashes, drips, and strokes of paint appear, indicating an abundance of the quiet spaces beyond and between a cacophony of signs and symbols.



Installation view of Suzanne McClelland, "Infinity's Twin – earth" (2024), mixed media on canvas, 98 x 78 inches



Suzanne McClelland, "Infinity's Twin – water" (2024), mixed media on canvas, 106 x 77 inches

[Suzanne McClelland: Highland Seer](#) continues at Marianne Boesky Gallery (507 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through June 8.