

# HALSEY MCKAY GALLERY

## ***GREENER GRASS*** curated by **DAVID KENNEDY CUTLER**

CYNTHIA DAIGNAULT, LOIS DODD, JANET FISH, JANE FREILICHER, HENRY GLAVIN,  
VAN HANOS, RAYMIE IADEVAIA, YVONNE JACQUETTE, JARRETT KEY,  
AUBREY LEVINHAL, HILARY PECIS, ALEXANDER RUSSI, AUBREY SAGET,  
CLAIRE SHERMAN, KARL STUECKLEN, BILLY SULLIVAN, PAUL THEK



Janet Fish, *Pinwheels and Poppies*, 1990, Oil on canvas, 64 x 70 inches

August 6 - 30, 2022 | 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY  
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*Greener Grass* is an intergenerational exhibition dedicated to observational painting. This show is by no means a comprehensive survey of contemporary works using landscape, domestic interiors, and still life. Rather, this is my subjective curatorial take on individual artists who use compositional framing, art-historical inspiration, and general intuition to convey friction between the natural and built worlds. They operate within a timeless medium, but are able to craft idealized spaces from unique vantages. These are painters who pursued arts education and community in bustling cities, but feel a strong need to connect back to subtleties found in natural phenomena, domestic settings and rural life. Each artist inevitably has a different reason for pursuing their subjects, but all their works are imbued with a rigorous and thoughtful dedication to painting.

It comes as a shock to me that I am curating a show about observational painting, because that was how how I was taught to paint as a child in Vermont, and I resoundingly rejected it the further I got from my home. However, recent encounters have made me reconsider the pursuit of observational painting as an artistic strategy.

Young painters in New York, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia are turning to rarefied moments of quietude. Alexander Russi mines his teeming Bed Stuy garden of vegetables, flowers and weeds. Henry Glavin's compositions of barns, backyards, and country houses are nesting eggs of clapboard siding, porches, rafters, open doors, windows and framed artworks that contain vistas within. Hilary Pecis has conjured an entire universe of interior and exterior spaces chock-full of the possessions that portray how young, creative people choose to live in cities. Aubrey Levinthal also captures the spirit of youthful urban living, although she uses interior and still life elements to create obfuscations for the ambivalent figures that inhabit her paintings. Claire Sherman captures thickets, overgrowth, and fields of wildflowers with expressive bravado and bold ambition. An artist who often works in performance and sculpture, Jarrett Key, has metaphorically returned to rural Alabama with oil on concrete or panel paintings of teaming fields populated by colorful flowers. Aubrey Saget packs her modestly scaled paintings of flowers, plants, and landscapes with a rushing, linear intensity that matches our contemporary engagement with the natural world. Raymie Iadevaia says of his hallucinatory landscapes: "like a cat brushing its head on people and places, I paint to get closer to the textures of the world."

The exhibition also features artists who overtly contrast plein-air and photographic sources in their paintings. Van Hanos utilizes myriad histories of genre painting fed through the lens of photography and digital culture, producing an ever-shifting body of irreverent works that manage to perpetuate the romance of oil painting's essence. Cynthia Daignault uses observational painting as a foil, a mediating tool, and a conceptual framework to engage with art history, narrative, social issues, activism, and time-based media.

Lois Dodd hovers above the exhibition as a pioneer of visionary commitment, whose influence on some of the artists in the show is indisputable. Thinking of her approach and her commitment led me to think of others like Janet Fish, Jane Freilicher, Yvonne Jacquette and Billy Sullivan, who have dedicated themselves to the types of observational painting that define the spirit of this exhibition. All have worked within the discourse of contemporary art, but have set themselves apart from it, short-circuiting the linear narrative of modernist art history.

I must confess, the artists I have not yet mentioned are my primary motivation for curating this show: Karl Stuecklen and Paul Thek. My parents arranged for me to study with Stuecklen when I was very young, each week dropping me off at his Geodesic dome situated on the side of a Vermont mountainside.

He was a rigorous and intensely serious post-impressionist painter who started me off painting flowers, table-top arrangements, and the panoramic view of the birch trees that his studio was perched above. Karl, and the genre of landscape painting so commonly found in Vermont felt crushingly conservative to a kid who couldn't wait to move to a city and go to art school, and fall into a community of young artists.

In 2016, it came as quite the surprise to learn that an artist I admired deeply, Paul Thek, was a very close friend of Karl's. In the 1970's Karl traveled with Thek throughout Europe as Thek revolutionized installation art. Shortly before Thek's death, Karl arranged for him to stay at my father's house in Vermont for a period of time. Karl's widow, Jayne, shared drawings and poems with me that Thek had made, nestled in Karl's sketchbooks. Looking through catalogs on Thek's work, I noticed that when drawing from life, the two friends had a style that reminded me of one another. *Greener Grass* includes drawings by both Thek and Stuecklen, from their vacations on the island of Panza, Italy, where they were clearly drawing from similar vantages, perhaps right next to one another.

Thek's observational works are consistent outliers in a diverse career that is defined by its absolute freedom to try nearly any approach to art-making, but his drawings and paintings of sky, water, cities, windows, and vegetation carry an aura that is distinctly his own. His work has an ability to jump time and space, interior and exterior, urban and rural.

I suppose that *Greener Grass* is an homage to my earliest experiences in an artist's studio, and an appreciation for a kind of art that I didn't have the patience to inhabit. By curating this exhibition, I can show my respect to where I came from and where I'm going, the people I've learned from, the people I've met, the people I would like to meet, and the idealized places that I can only see through other people's eyes.

-David Kennedy Cutler