

## **SAM HEMMENWAY SPECTACLES**

In her essay, "On the Concept of Reading," Simone Weil writes about the experience of a common visual mistake people make — to confuse something active for something inanimate. She describes the experience as walking alone on a road at night and seeing a man in the distance to realize there is only a tree. In different cases, she identifies the experience of the external and the imaginary colliding into some kind of real or truth. The two things, the man and the tree, meet each other in this moment then one or the other fades upon readjustment. In order to recognize the tree the man must fade but as Weil notes, the experience of the imaginary has also been, in some way, just as real. She writes, "Each reading when it is current appears as the only real possible way to look at things. The other one seems purely imaginary."

Weil, in her text, talks about being "seized" by the presence of the man and in this seizure her mind creates a world, bringing it to the one that already exists simultaneously. She writes, "There is not an appearance and then an interpretation; a human presence has penetrated to my soul through my eyes, and now, just as suddenly, the presence of a tree." We cannot separate the two things in this experience; they occur together. We could think about this as a kind of phenomenological experience similar to the one when we look at art. Looking at paintings is some kind of seizure from the outside, a penetrating presence.

Sam Hemmenway's paintings here attempt to capture that seizure, the moment of both the man and tree, the moment before the real and after the imaginary, somewhere just in between, where they meet. His canvases allude to a world, an image, a memory but are experienced before everything comes into focus.

The first time Sam told me about his paintings we were sitting on the concrete next to a pool at a house party. The water was glowing and we were watching it sway with intoxicated eyes. I asked about his work and what kind of paintings he made and he said, "it's that thing where you think you see a deer but it's just a bush."

- Gracie Hadland