

HALSEY MCKAY GALLERY

ELEANOR CONOVER | LAUREN LULOFF | TESSA G. O'BRIEN

Curated by HILARY SCHAFFNER

Oct. 25 - Dec. 31, 2025 | 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY

For further information email contact@halseymckay.com



Eleanor Conover, *Partings*, 2024, Oil, acrylic, bleach, and graphite on sewn canvas and linen with bowed and beveled pine, 76 x 96 x 4 inches

In a 1976 documentary titled *American Artists in Europe*, Joan Mitchell is interviewed in her studio in Vétheuil, France. Indicating towards Mitchell's view of the green hills and pointed trees that Monet also admired and painted, director Angelica Haas asks: "does it help you?". Meaning does the view help you paint? Mitchell immediately responds, pointedly, with full sincerity and reverence: "No I always paint with the windows closed because I could never possibly copy that." For Mitchell painting directly from observed landscape would be a disservice to the nature that she so loved; instead her paintings invoke the landscape through her remembered perceptions and associated emotions.

Is Mitchell a landscape painter? For me, I would like to think so, however, within art historical context, landscape painting comes with a highly traditional and codified set of expectations which certainly have existed within painting traditions in the state of Maine where Eleanor Conover, Lauren Luloff and Tessa G. O'Brien currently reside.

Working with the visual language of the landscape carries both the burden and the richness of its history. Eleanor, Lauren and Tessa carry this dichotomy into their approaches using materiality, felt perception and observation as guides.

Eleanor Conover's shaped canvases make me think of the way water flows over stone. Over time, the repetitiveness of the changing tides leave their marks, their indentations, their grooves and ultimately shape the rocks. This synthesis of organic and structural is at the core of Conover's work. Having spent many summers in the quarries of Maine, Conover draws inspiration from the structural elements of rock formations and begins the construction of her paintings with a sketch. Like an architect mapping the armature of their building the sketch is the guiding force as she begins to work. Once determined, the supports are then built, fabric is dyed and prepped, repeatedly ironed, sewn together and then stretched. Only at this point does painting begin. Deeply influenced by the blocky paint application and brash use of negative space in Cezanne's watercolor drawings, Eleanor's remembered experiences of nature take hold as she paints her surfaces.

Lauren Luloff's work thrives within the boundaries of her immediate surroundings. She is inundated with, dare I say, the sublime landscape that is her coastal home in Lubec, Maine. However, these are not paintings wrought with romantic adoration. They challenge the viewer with a myriad of visual information and personal process. She creates an homage to her surroundings through taming the unwieldy and unpredictable relationship between dye and silk. The effect and mastery of this material combination brings to mind the washy paint application of Helen Frankenthaler. Sewing the delicate silk together then painting on it with dye each piece of fabric is a painting unto itself. Figures, local flora and fauna, the sea outside her studio window are all represented along with stripes and grid-like patterns. Lauren creates her own version of a vivid landscape rich with personal inquiry and reverence for her surroundings.

Tessa G. O'Brien's paintings sizzle with urgency. Constructed with sewn together, dyed pieces of canvas, her paintings take shape with the application of wax resist, bleach and oil paint. This combination of materials along with Tessa's feather light brushwork gives the paintings a sensual and fantastical effect. Obsessive in her love of Place, Tessa continually returns to paint specific locales, absorbing the hyper-regional geography, weather, and folklore, allowing these histories to inform her paintings. This specificity of time and place (she often titles her work with the location) drives the unique atmospheric haze which lingers over her surfaces - an other-worldly aura akin to the work of Charles E. Burchfield. In both her studio paintings and her observational plein air works, one can sense O'Brien's drive to capture what is fleeting in nature combined with an inquisitive delight in what binds her to that moment.

Traditional landscape painting is horizontal in its presentation to the viewer. It is precisely painted through observation defined in direct and literal terms. The work in this exhibition wrestles with this artistic traditionalism while pointing to alternative approaches. At its core this exhibition celebrates the richness of connection - the artists' connection to one another as contemporaries, their connection to the site from which inspiration is drawn, and our collective connection to the rich and wrought art historical context of landscape painting.

- Hilary Schaffner, 2025

Eleanor Conover, born 1988 in Hartford, CT, lives and works in Topsham, ME. Lauren Luloff, born 1980 in Dover, NH lives and works in Lubec, ME. Tessa G.O'Brien, born 1982 in St. George, ME, is based in South Portland, ME.