

Art Map Burlington, November 2011

Immersion: Recent Paintings by Gail Salzman

by Amy Rahn



In **Gail Salzman's** suite of fourteen lush abstract paintings, the works are titled categorically: *Pond 4* and *Pond 5*, for example. The organizational titles suggest a cerebral cataloguing of the artist's experiences with nature. Yet Salzman's paintings have the feeling of water. The artist's earthy palette and painterly style both represent water and evoke it. Salzman paints on panels rather than working on an intrinsically permeable surface like canvas or linen. The opacity of the panels functions like the pond floor—a stable ground beneath the fluid paint.

In these works, Salzman paints in saturated color—often yellow-greens, ochre, blue-green and persimmon red—with a raucous multiplicity of techniques. In *Pond 5*, a deep reddish brown paint crackles into branchlike forms over thick washes of pea green edged with persimmon red. Salzman's complex, layered ecosystems of color depend on the materiality of paint as much as the pigment. As many art observers know, cool colors recede into the picture plane and warmer tones advance. Salzman upsets that visual dynamic using the physical properties of paint—its resistance to water, its capacity to layer and be thinned or thickened. On the right side of *Pond 5*, vein-like trails of deep blue paint branch over a warmer green wash. Seen from a few paces, the deep blue recedes, but up close, it stands physically off the picture plane, advancing over the warm tones, even as it recedes tonally.

The tension between the physicality of the painting and its color composition draws the viewer's eye through each shifting field of color, yielding surprises along the way.

In *Little Pond 5*, a series of orangey-peach washes surround a defined area of blue-green and red strokes, splashes of midnight blue, and watery greens. The central cool tones create a feeling of looking into a deep pool while seeing the water's reflective surface, like a lagoon. Colors mash and swirl over the surface of the painting, but the piece has a feeling of suspension, as though the painting's surface were floating on water. Material, color and form combine to evoke the sensation of water, its calm tangibility.

Shown at the height of the richly hued Vermont autumn, Salzman's paintings seem a swan song for the color and ease of summer's warm swimming ponds. In their colorful midst, the feeling of buoyancy lingers.

"Immersion: Recent Paintings by Gail Salzman" ran from September 24 to October 26, 2010.

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