

MONA BRODY

THE IDEA OF THINGS

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ESSAY BY LISA A. BANNER

THE
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Subtle Alchemies: The Paintings of Mona Brody

Landscapes of memory emerge at the center of Mona Brody's canvases, conveying *The Idea of Things*. Interleaved and shimmering, these paintings join past, present, and future, in evanescent vessels of memory, the physical space of the canvas. Capturing fugitive qualities of light, Brody forms a space where hard lines fade, and colors emerge from within. Using a palette of opaque white and silvery grey, the artist translates an interior thought into a visible souvenir of the private and invisible. *The Idea of Things* is Brody's own internal narrative, but the contours of the narrative become visible as manifestations of light and gesture on the painted canvas, tracing subtle alchemies of form that welcome interpretation.

Emerging after a darker and more burdened series of paintings, devoted to places of memory [*Temenos*], *The Idea of Things* takes on ghostly forms, and makes them approachable. Beginning with underdrawing over a gessoed ground, Brody's paintings begin with accumulated veils of paint on paper or canvas supports.

The paintings exhibited here share a limited palette of slate gray, blues, and coppery brown, sometimes slashed with strokes of silver or gold or white. Several are particularly evocative. In *Blue Jewel*, the central vessel evokes a serene iceberg, surrounded by the dark waters of a certain depth, revealing nuggets of sapphire-blue, ringed with overdrawing, opening onto the water behind. *Deep Sleep*, the darkest canvas in *The Idea of Things* series, is anchored with a fawn-colored center, flanked at bottom with muted slate blue that fills the corners. *Discernible Increase*, filled with cellular forms, implies an accumulation of petals, a multi-lobed plant form, defined against a shimmery white. *Space Between* suggests progress through the day, where the early part is fueled with more potent color. *Breathlessness* implies a tangle at the midsection, a tightness of color and form wrapped into a knot where Brody's forms wrestle for dominance in color and closeness. Constriction is implied in *Breathlessness*, composed of dark grey and blue tones that undergird the central gathering of leaves or petals of brown that flutter around the top and edges. High on the canvas light separates the foreground and the background of the painting, creating a horizon where two planes meet; the coppery brown glow of the top, colored with ground mica, also trickles down into the bottom half of the canvas, leaving the viewer pondering Brody's concealed application of pigment. At the heart of *Been Something*, a soft and feathery collection of strokes is a rendition of pale fire, the white-hot center of a canvas lit from within.

Following a residency in Boleslawiec, Poland, Brody changed the focus of her work until reaching the *Temenos* series that explored dark and hidden passages from the past. Following that darker series *The Idea of Things* reveals ephemeral fantasies emerging from memory as light and energy. The new series differs markedly from the dark and laden canvases of *Temenos*, yet they both started with Brody's careful layering process. Applying paint over a grey ground to create subtle and nuanced effects, she begins by hiding the lead grey foundation, onto which she has sometimes drawn lines, yielding an element of surprise upon close investigation.

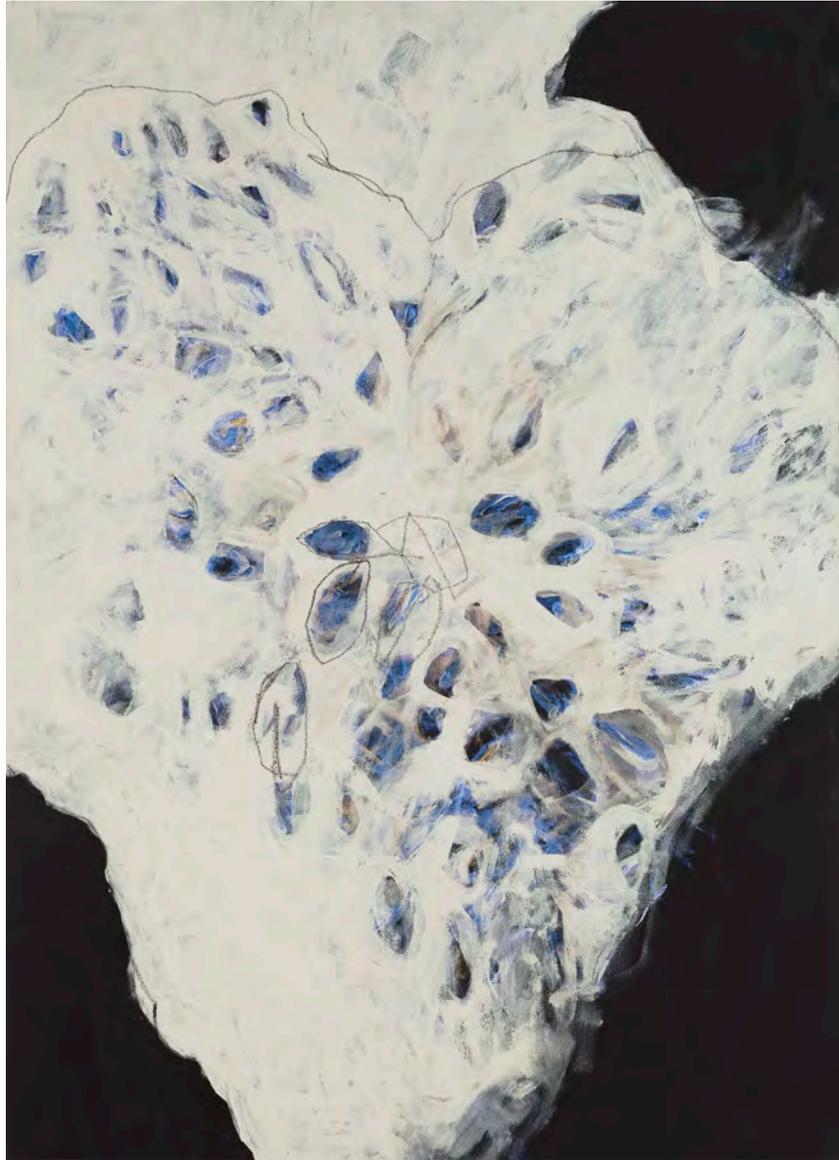
For *The Idea of Things*, the artist described an afternoon encounter when she saw her mother sitting by the window in a haze of light. Light falling around her white hair outlined her form, and completely eclipsed her mother's shape in the chair, making her seem to be one with the light entering through the window. These memories, in the context of Brody's readings of Jung and her exploration of the unconscious and the dreamscape, led to explorations of light on the canvas. As she describes the paintings, through "the expressive and physical nature of the materials and the suggested autobiographical content, the passage of the personal transmutes into the ambiguous."

Often Brody draws on top of the painting as it is nearing completion, with a brush, charcoal, markers, or pencil or ink. She also applies mica to the surface of her canvas, adding the fractured and shimmering mineral to consecutive paint layers. Ground mica can have a copper hue, as in *The Space Between*. Brody interferes with the surfaces of her paintings, adding lines of drawing around forms, to emphasize them or force them to recede. At other times she uses a gold oil paint applied over the gray substrate, to achieve shimmering effects. Brody investigates that place where oil and pigment create a living surface that reflects an unspoken intention. Her paintings become vessels that receive and hold memory, revealing or concealing the contours, bringing subtle alchemy to a personal landscape in *The Idea of Things*.

Lisa A. Banner, Ph.D., Visiting Associate Professor, Pratt Institute

Lisa A. Banner is an author and curator with both national and international credits. Her published work includes *The Religious Patronage of the Duke of Lerma 1598-1621*, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. She is currently working on a satellite installation at the New Orleans biennial Prospect 3+.

Blue Jewel, 2013
acrylic, graphite, oil on linen, 50" x 36"



Discernable Increase, 2013
acrylic on canvas, 26" x 20"



Deep Sleep, 2014
acrylic, oil on canvas, 20" x 16"



Space Between, 2014
acrylic, oil on linen, 60" x 42"



Breathlessness, 2014
acrylic, charcoal, on paper mounted on linen, 50" x 38"



Been Something, 2014
oil on paper mounted on linen, 50" x 38"



Raw Silk, 2014
acrylic, oil on canvas, 20" x 16"



Micaceous, 2013

acrylic, mica, graphite on paper mounted on linen, 50" x 38"



Mona Brody has exhibited extensively in the United States and internationally. Her solo and upcoming solo exhibitions include The Painting Center, New York, NY, The President's Gallery, Pratt Institute of Art, Brooklyn, NY, the Montclair Art Museum Montclair, NJ, Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, Newark, NJ. Ben Shahn Galleries, William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ, Wood Art Gallery, Vermont College, Montpelier, Vt, and the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, Summit, NJ.

Brody's work has been included at the Künstlerhaus, Graz, Austria, the Kimmel Center Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, Medialia's Rack and Hamper Gallery, NY, the Morris Museum of Art, Morristown, NJ, Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, Rutgers, The State University of NJ, New Brunswick, NJ, Johnson & Johnson Corporate Gallery, New Brunswick, NJ, Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia, PA, Nanjing College of Art, Nanjing, China, and Boleslawiec Art Museum, International Ceramic and Sculpture Symposium, Boleslawiec, Poland.

Public collections that own her work are The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York, The Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ, The New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ, Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, Rutgers State University, New Brunswick, NJ. Boleslawiec Art Museum, Boleslawiec, Poland, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Sweet Briar, VA and the Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ.

Brody has been awarded Fellowships and Honors from Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, Rutgers State University, New Brunswick, NJ, New Jersey Artist/Teacher Fellowship, Geraldine Dodge Foundation. Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Sweet Briar, VA, The 33rd International Sculpture Symposium, Boleslawiec, Poland, FIPSE Creative Cluster Grant, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, The Governor's Award in Arts Education, New Jersey State Department of Education, the Contemporary Art Center, North Adams, Massachusetts, and Connecticut Graphic Arts Center, Artist & Master Printer Norwalk, CT.

She is a visiting Professor of Art at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY. Her educational experience includes "Educating Through the Arts" Visual AIDS, New York, Educational Coordinator, responsible for creating partnerships and art projects. She developed a collaboration between the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Harlem, NY and Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY, "Drawing Democracies." She received an MFA in Visual Arts from Vermont College of Art, MS in Art Education from Massachusetts College of Art, and a BFA in Printmaking, Moore College of Art & Design.

Catalog Design: Shazzi Thomas

Photography: Kevin Noble

