

Katharine Dufault. : To Be In The Same World.

Solo exhibition at The Painting Center June 22 - July 17 2021

The selection of recent paintings by Katharine Dufault seen in her solo exhibition at the Painting Center display a deep connection to nature as a source of inspiration. Encountering these quiet confident paintings one can imagine that the title of the exhibition, To Be In The Same World, reveals the artist's deep connection to the natural world beyond the mere depiction of nature and that this connection feels both poetic and transcendental.

Dufault demonstrates a skillful and reductive approach to landscape. The results which appear deceptively simple display flattened graphic elements of trees, horizon and sky. It is no easy task to render the deep space of a mountain valley with surrounding hills and attendant copse of trees in a manner that strips the whole scene down to its very bones as seen in Full Moon On Quiet Trees. But the viewer is rewarded with Dufault's practice of employing color as content and shape as feeling. The results feel insightful and personal.

These paintings, which cross boundaries into complete abstraction and back again in their pictorial range, speak to the universal and aspirational impact the natural world can have on our collective waking and unconscious mind. There is a certain mild invitation for the viewer to enter the scene and fill in the brushwork with one's own content and feeling. That the artist might have felt rapture while encountering a scene out in the wild is of no help to us in seeing what she has seen, or feeling what she has felt. But viewing the paintings she has brought back from her imagination transport us with her in the idealizing desire to hold still in our mind that which cannot be held at all. These pictures are remarkable in their modest power of suggestion.

When considering Dufault's landscape artworks I am reminded of the painter Milton Avery (1885 - 1965) and his wife the painter Sally Michel (1902 - 2003) who both expressed their interest in color as content and shape as feeling with their explorations in landscape, still life and portraiture. Their bold reductive and indelible artworks were in turn inspired by Matisse in ways that remove formal distractions in a composition and focus instead on the primacy of form and color. Avery's work had influenced many of the abstract expressionists who championed radical approaches to rendering paintings that were closer to visual poetry than a slavish devotion to literal representation. One can see that legacy of vision here as well.

The title of the exhibition, To Be In The Same World is also the name of a poetry anthology by the poet Peter Kane Dufault (1923 - 2013). His poems were published in significant periodicals and were celebrated and highly regarded yet he remained relatively unknown throughout his career. He was the artist's father-in-law and her familiarity with the poet's work reveals a

personal approach to how these paintings might render a visual kind of poetry. The artist has stated her resonance with many of the poems. Such as *Acer Americanus* -

Is this all there is —
a ubiquitous Carbon driving
into the highest forks of the maples
and the highest offices hunting
empires of sunlight and water or money and blood
for ballast against the moon?
Or have I been too long under these trees?

Katharine Dufault's deft handling of paint reveals her poetic predilections such as in *Midwinter II*, *Morning Gesture* and *Poet's Walk*, three paintings depicting the structure of trees in striking ways. Although small in scale, *Midwinter II* and *Morning Gesture* present intimate backlit scenes where the simple idea of trees has been transfigured into the sinew of single gestures from a brush, poetry indeed. Larger in scale, *Poet's Walk* presents a harrowing verdant green path through a pink floored forest of bare trees, a *di Chirico* like space of hard shadows in washes and stripes and bright light, daring us to walk forward and accept whatever fate has waiting beyond.

The Moon appears in a dozen or so of the paintings, as a familiar sojourner halting the motion of the scenes while casting its pale crepuscular illumination. It is a signifier of time, here seen at its fullest yet bound to circle through the sky in phases, moving tides and bodies. We see the moon here again, holding still that which cannot be held within an intimate frame. Ms. Dufault shows us her vision of the natural world as a way to know one's own feelings about existing in that world. That is to say that Ms. Dufault embraces being out there as a means to find one's place within ourselves.

Along with other evocative landscapes and several expressive portraits, *To Be In The Same World* shows an artist reveling in the poetry of painting. The exhibition runs from June 22 - July 17, 2021 at The Painting Center 547 West 27th Street, Suite 500 New York, NY Opening reception for the artist on June 24th.

-Henry Mandell
Oregon Coast 2021