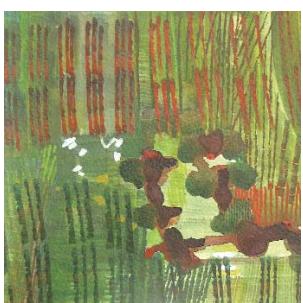
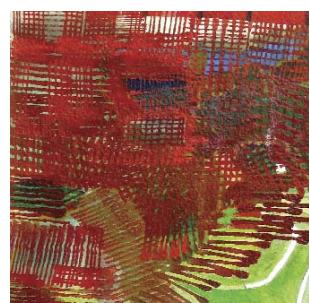


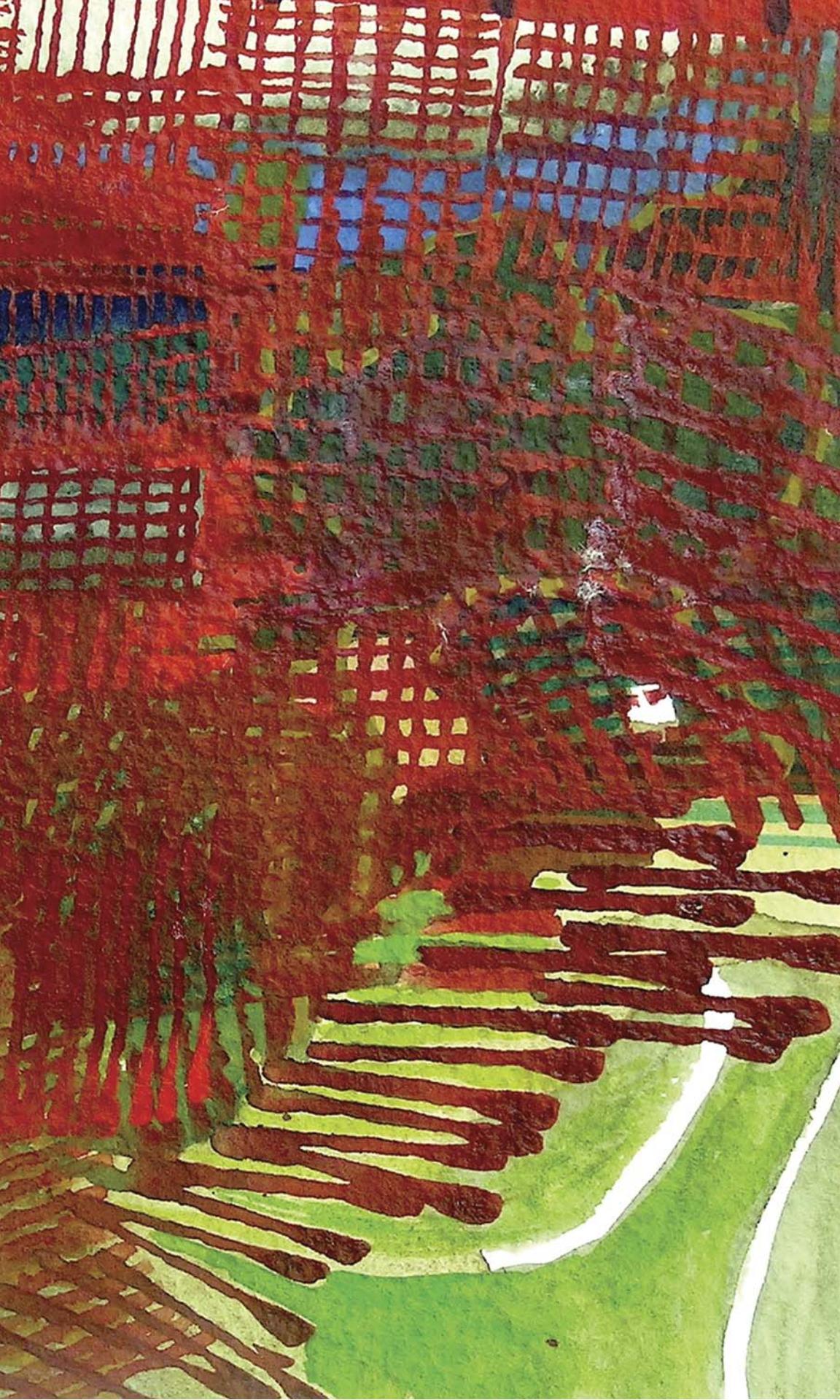
# Painting Paper

9.24 – 10.22.2010

Ruffin Gallery  
McIntire Department of Art  
University of Virginia



Right. Josette Urso. Detail of *Ravello Heat*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches



# Painting Paper

9.24 – 10.22.2010

Amy Chan  
Judith Linhares  
Linda Marston-Reid  
Kathy Muehlemann  
Elena Sisto  
Josette Urso  
Stephen Westfall

Curated by  
Megan Marlatt  
Professor,  
McIntire Dept. of Art, U.Va.

## Covers

Josette Urso. All paintings: 2010,  
watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches.

Front cover, left to right

Row 1 *Vietri Oratorio, Baia Float, Lligrat Flow*  
Row 2 *Sea Sand, Cava Park Day, Ravello Heat*  
Row 3 *Ravello Bench View, Villa Chimbrone, Oratorio Courtyard*  
Row 4 *Ravello Garden High, Café Fountain View, Amalfi Three*

Back cover, left to right

Row 1 *Cadaques Walk, Baia Beach Sun, Sea Calm*  
Row 2 *Kayak Balcony, Picnic, Beach Melt*  
Row 3 *Cetara Bloom, Vietri Sea Float, Gelato*  
Row 4 *Sea Slide, Sorrento Night Port, Vietri Quiet*

This publication accompanies the exhibition

**Painting on Paper**  
September 24 – October 22, 2010  
Ruffin Gallery

The exhibition is sponsored by a generous gift from the UVa Arts Council. Contributors also include the McIntire Department of Art and Arts\$.

A special thank you to Meaghan Kiernan for editing.

Published by The Painters Left,  
McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia  
Publication © 2010 The Painters Left,  
McIntire Department of Art  
All artworks ©2010 by the individual artists  
Text ©2010 Mike Maizels  
McIntire Department of Art  
University of Virginia  
P.O. Box 400130, Rugby Road  
Charlottesville VA 22904

ISBN 978-0-9773828-2-8

Essays by  
**Mike Maizels**  
Graduate Student  
History of Art & Architecture  
McIntire Dept. of Art, U.Va.

Ruffin Gallery

McIntire Department of Art  
University of Virginia

## Curatorial Statement

**Painting and paper: two words rarely used in tandem** within titles of painting exhibitions. As the support historically favored for preparatory studies, paper is a material commonly viewed as part of the artist's creative process and distinct from the final, painted work. Since the Renaissance, the archetypal painting process has been oil-on-canvas. This venerated tradition has, however, become burdened with its own history. It became laden with a litany of demigod Geniuses and their associated Masterpieces, weighed down with antiquated systems of iconography and expectations of quasi-religious rapture. But despite numerous declarations of the death of painting over the last century and a half, the practice of painting continues to live. It has been nearly three decades since painting was "returned to" in the early 1980s, and since this ostensible resurrection, painting has enjoyed a florescence of divergent artistic practices. While graffiti style works command the contemporary auction market, painting with water media on paper is enjoying a quiet resurgence.

Right. Josette Urso. Detail of *Vietri Sea Float*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches





**Less encumbered by its own history than oil-on-canvas**, painting on paper is a highly flexible practice that takes many forms and directions. The methods displayed here are incredibly heterogeneous, ranging from improvisational sketches to refined and finished works, from explorations of classical themes to investigations of more modern topics. Both Judith Linhares and Elena Sisto create informal work that reinterprets the tales of popular folklore, from the myths of ancient Greece to the fairy tales of medieval Germany. Stephen Westfall and Kathy Muehlemann produce highly refined abstractions; yet while Muehlmann's billowing forms seem to hover just on the brink of dissolution, Westfall's more closely adhere to the look of hard-edged, geometric abstraction. Josette Urso, Amy Chan and Linda Marston-Reid all evoke a sense of place in their work: Urso travels to paint the dazzling light of the Mediterranean; Chan incorporates pop culture and playful science into her large scale, superflat style depictions of the landscape of her native New England; Marston-Reid applies the sensibility she developed painting the deserts of California to rooftop scenes set in her new home of Brooklyn.

**By showcasing the diversity of contemporary painting on paper,**

this exhibition aims to reveal the dynamic possibilities latent in the medium. Kathy Muehleman, professor of painting at Randolph College and exhibiting here in Ruffin Gallery for the first time, perhaps captures this sense of dynamism best.

We will leave the last words to her. She writes, "To set color loose in water is like riding a horse without a bridle. You must bring your whole self to it."

— Megan Marlatt and Mike Maizels

Right. Josette Urso. Detail of *Kayak Balcony*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches



## Stephen Westfall

Stephen Westfall's colorful, untitled compositions **pulsate with potential energy**.

Evocative of the grid-based abstractions of modernist artists Piet Mondrian and Frank Stella, Westfall's paintings pack vivid colors into dense ribbons that seem to vibrate against one another. The first work, which is particularly reminiscent of the hard-edged abstractions of Stella, is structured around a mid-line seam that splits a series of neatly divided striations. In the second, which features three rows of offset colored polygons, we see a complementary aspect of Westfall's imagery: the way in which his hand-drawn contours wobble and warble with the specificity of their creator's brushwork. Westfall cites Agnes Martin as an important precedent for his painting and one can clearly see how both artists have productively explored the complex boundaries between geometric and painterly abstraction. But there is also something of the tradition of American folk quilting in these images; Westfall stitches vibrant swaths of color into rectilinear abstractions that seem to celebrate their own informal materiality over the sheen of prefabricated perfection.

While Westfall's painting tends to divide itself between more representational, neo-Pop infused images and the geometric abstractions represented here, his work is **laden with irony**, often multiple layers of it. Utilizing similar color palettes and compositional strategies across these two bodies of work, Westfall asserts an ironic distance between himself and his subject matter and, in his words, defends himself against ideological Romanticism. This may sound like an example of what art critic Hal Foster terms cynical realism: a trend in contemporary painting based on empty rehashings of formerly earnest artistic movements and styles. But unlike the work Foster denounces, Westfall's painting remains insistently ambivalent, evincing an obvious affinity for the objects it also attempts to dismiss. Irony acts as the lens through which Westfall paints the world, whether it is the world of the city, the commodity, or the abstract form. Irony, in Westfall's words, is "an expression of love in an impure world."

— Mike Maizels



*"The elements themselves are observably repetitive...  
The wager is that out of this repetition a kind  
of deep-structure evolution takes place."*

— Stephen Westfall

Stephen Westfall. *Untitled*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 22½ x 30 inches.  
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc, NYC



Stephen Westfall. *Untitled*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 30 x 22½ inches.  
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc, NY

## Judith Linhares

Executed with **vivid colors and expressive brushwork**, Judith Linhares' paintings draw inspiration from sources that range from early 20th century modernism to the visual culture of her native California. Linhares' flattened pictorial spaces and stylized figures recall the Fauves and Expressionists—the lounging figure of Amour in the first image is particularly evocative of Henri Matisse's *Large Reclining Nude* (1935)—while her brightly hued images appear reminiscent of the bold palettes of Mexican mural painting and California Pop.

Thematically, Linhares' work often deals with **narratives concerning nascent, feminine psychological and sexual awareness**. In this exhibition, Linhares revisits two such tales, one from classical antiquity and one from popular German folklore. The first painting depicts a pivotal moment in the story of Cupid and Psyche, a Greco-Roman myth that certain Jungian psychologists claimed was a metaphor for the processes of feminine psychological maturation. Linhares' *Psyche and Amour* captures the moment at which Psyche turns the tables on Cupid; no longer merely an object of his desiring gaze, the mortal Psyche catches the god Cupid unaware and watches him sleep helplessly in her bed. Significantly, this incident is one of two highly unique moments in the earliest written form of the tale in which the narrative is recounted from Psyche's perspective.

The other image, *Blaze*, offers a **reinterpretation of the Snow White story**. Linhares points out that in the original fairy tale, it takes an external stimulus—a kiss from the Prince—to arouse Snow White from sleep. Here, the protagonist awakens herself. Warming her nude body by the fire, Linhares' heroine is shown in a moment of auto-erotic and, by extension, autopoietic discovery. Both images, like numerous others in Linhares' oeuvre, deploy a unique, painterly style towards re-imagining traditional narratives about female agency, sexuality and power.

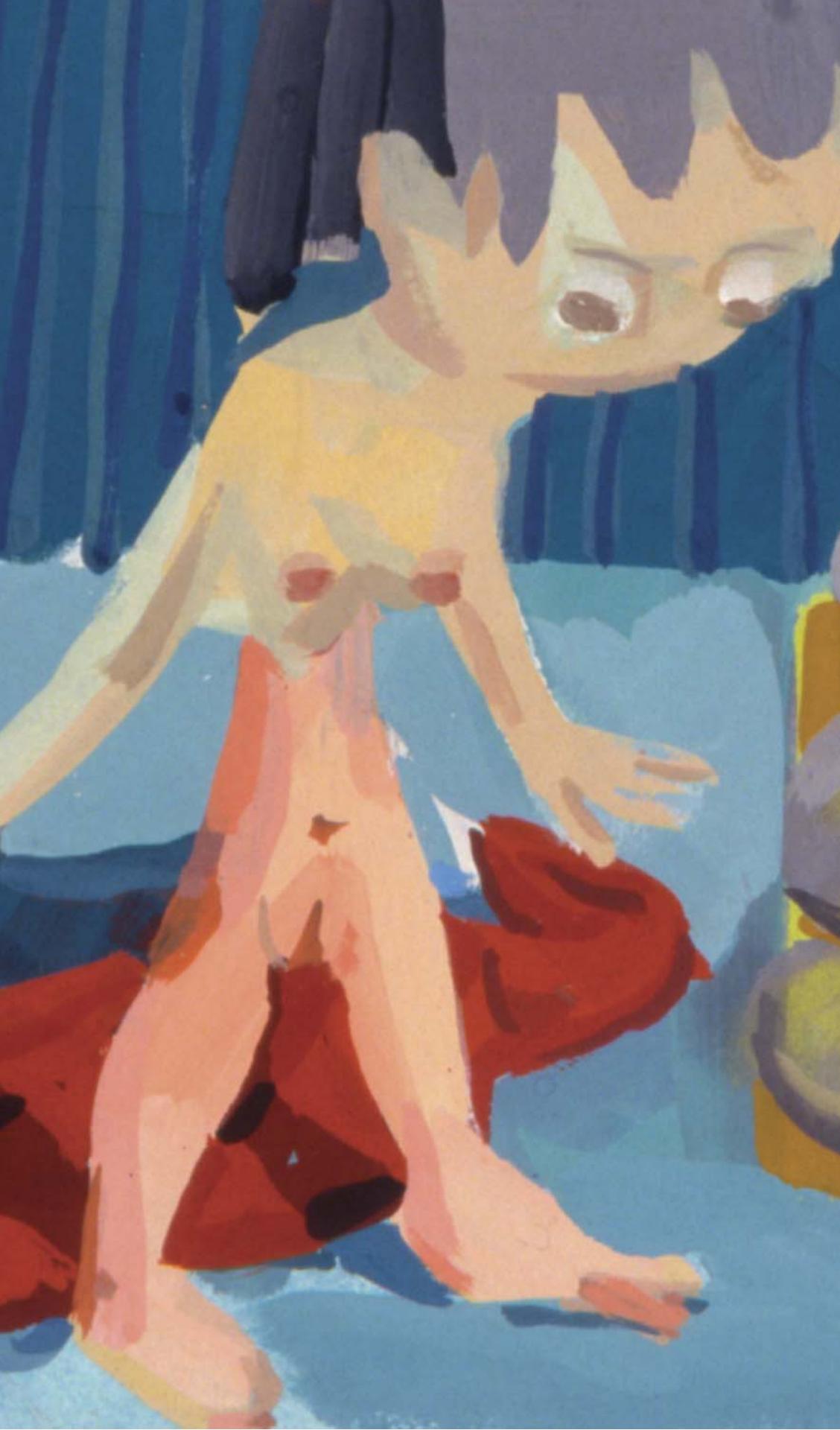
— Mike Maizels

Right. Judith Linhares. *Psyche and Armour*, 2002. Gouache on paper, 9 x 12 inches.  
Courtesy of Edward Thorpe Gallery, NYC

*“When I paint women, I am not thinking of them as beautiful objects or subjects but identifying with them, thinking about their relationships to one another and the viewer.”*

— Judith Linhares





Judith Linhares. *Blaze*, 2002. Gouache on paper, 11 x 16 inches.  
Courtesy of Edward Thorpe Gallery, NYC

Amy Chan

*Fairy Ring* is a resolutely ambiguous image; a pair of amorphous forms lingers tenuously before a blank-white background that oscillates between infinite depth and perfect flatness. While many of Amy Chan's images are colorfully patterned in the style of Japanese block prints, this work is executed with a sparse, largely monochrome palette, broken only by the acidic blue and yellow bands outlining the bottom form. These bands appear to create an unnatural kind of energy that melts the top form to reveal detritus, such as bits of feathers, twigs and acorns, often found within the receding snow in the forests of Chan's native New England. These landscapes seem like a fitting place for one to stumble across the apparent wreckage of *Fairy Ring*.

While the Northeast has long been a popular setting for tales of supernatural power, Chan's work differs from the traditionally romantic search for the fairies, ghosts and monsters of folklore. Rather than longing for the magical as a way to transcend the mundane, Chan's work—from her *Prehistoric New England* series to her *Danbury Fair* imagery—confuses these boundaries. In *Fairy Ring*, the colored bands that define the bottom form simultaneously suggest the coronal glow of otherworldly powers and the fluctuating discolorations of an aging television set. The title suggests a secret alliance of supernatural beings but also alludes to "fairy ring" mushroom formations, clustered arcs of fungi often found in Northeastern woods. Chan intermingles the mystical, the artificial and the quasi-scientific, blends the aesthetics of the East with the content of the West, and creates a body of work all her own.

—Mike Maizels

Opposite. Amy Chan. Detail of *Fairy Ring*, 2010. Gouache and acrylic on paper, 48 x 72 inches

“Carefully observed foregrounds are set against acidic skies...this patterned sky combines doomsday science fiction and plastic color into a forest landscape.”

— Amy Chan





Amy Chan. *Fairy Ring*, 2010. Gouache and acrylic on paper, 48 x 72 inches

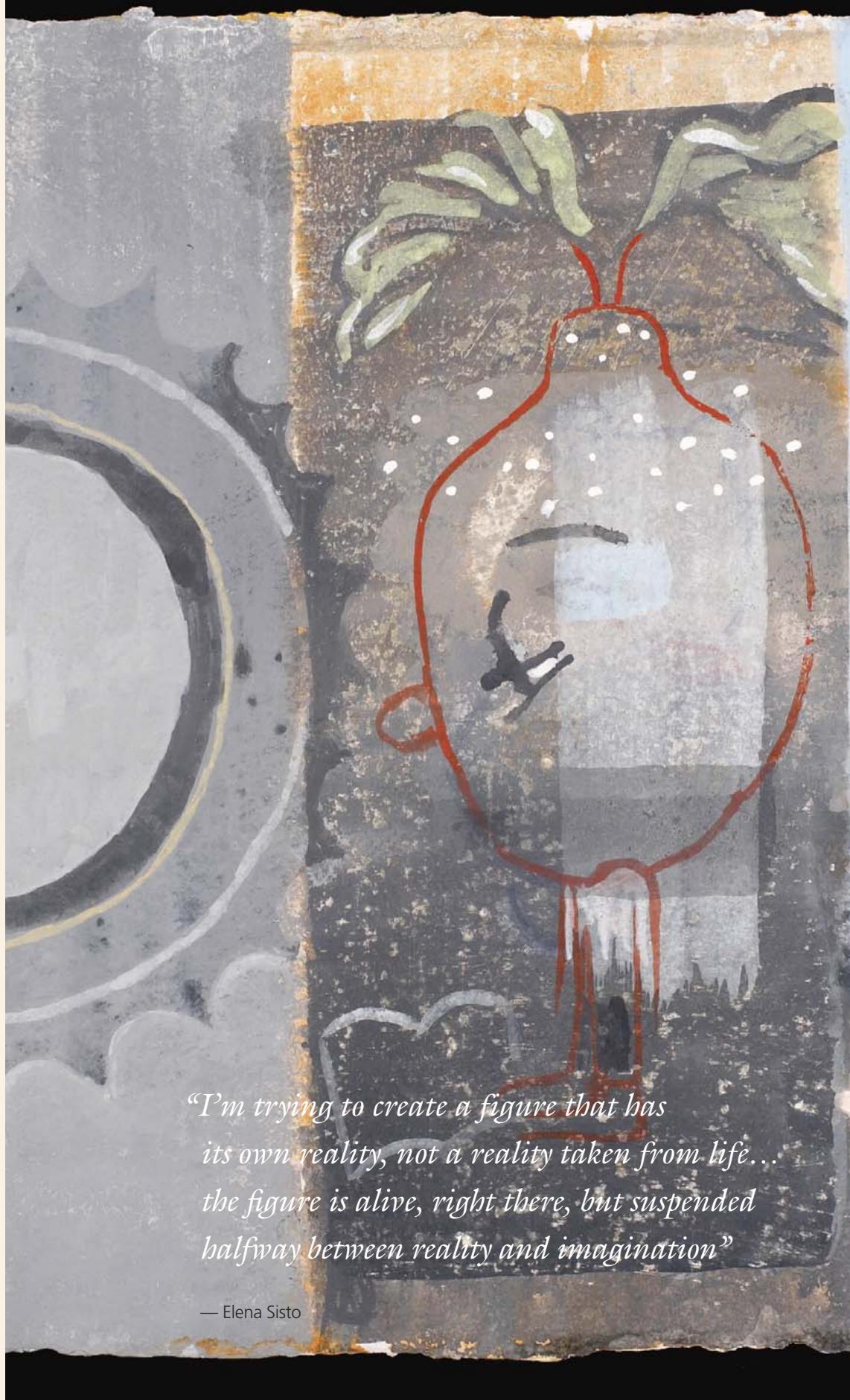
## Elena Sisto

Elena Sisto's paintings **evoke childhood tales** while maintaining an **unmistakable undercurrent of seriousness**, even darkness. Created with a complexity belied by their improvisational appearance, these images transport Sisto's repertoire of childhood figurines into nebulous and emotionally ambivalent narratives. In *Paisley Fall*, the figure, who is curiously ambiguous with regards to gender, appears to be bowing under the weight of its enormous, quasi-translucent head. The proportions of this head, as well as the eponymous *Fall*, elicit the legend of Humpty-Dumpty. *Fall* appears to have captured a moment both before and after the crash; the figure has clearly tipped past its center of gravity and is bracing for impact, staring intently at the ground with an almost paisley-shaped eye. But the paisley that comprises the figure, both in substance and in title, has already begun to break the fragile shell of its outline, flying out from the back of the figure's neck.

*Did I Miss My Cue?* also suggests the **re-envisioning of a folktale**, this time the Swiss legend of William Tell. Tell, who according to lore was forced to shoot an arrow into an apple resting precariously on the head of his son, reappears here as a kind of animated amazon, vaguely reminiscent of a salacious Teletubby. But unlike Tell, who was an infallible archer, this figure fires errant arrows over the head of his cowering companion, a melancholy figure with the head of an orange. These characters are joined into a condition of mutual impossibility; an archer with unfailing accuracy is obliged to miss his target, if not his cue, because the innocent head and targeted fruit have merged into one. Such conflations are the key to the strange world conjured up by these works, where legends synthesize with toys, heads fuse with objects and figures shatter and dissolve into their environments.

— Mike Maizels

Right. Elena Sisto. Detail of *The Bardo*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches



*"I'm trying to create a figure that has its own reality, not a reality taken from life... the figure is alive, right there, but suspended halfway between reality and imagination"*

— Elena Sisto

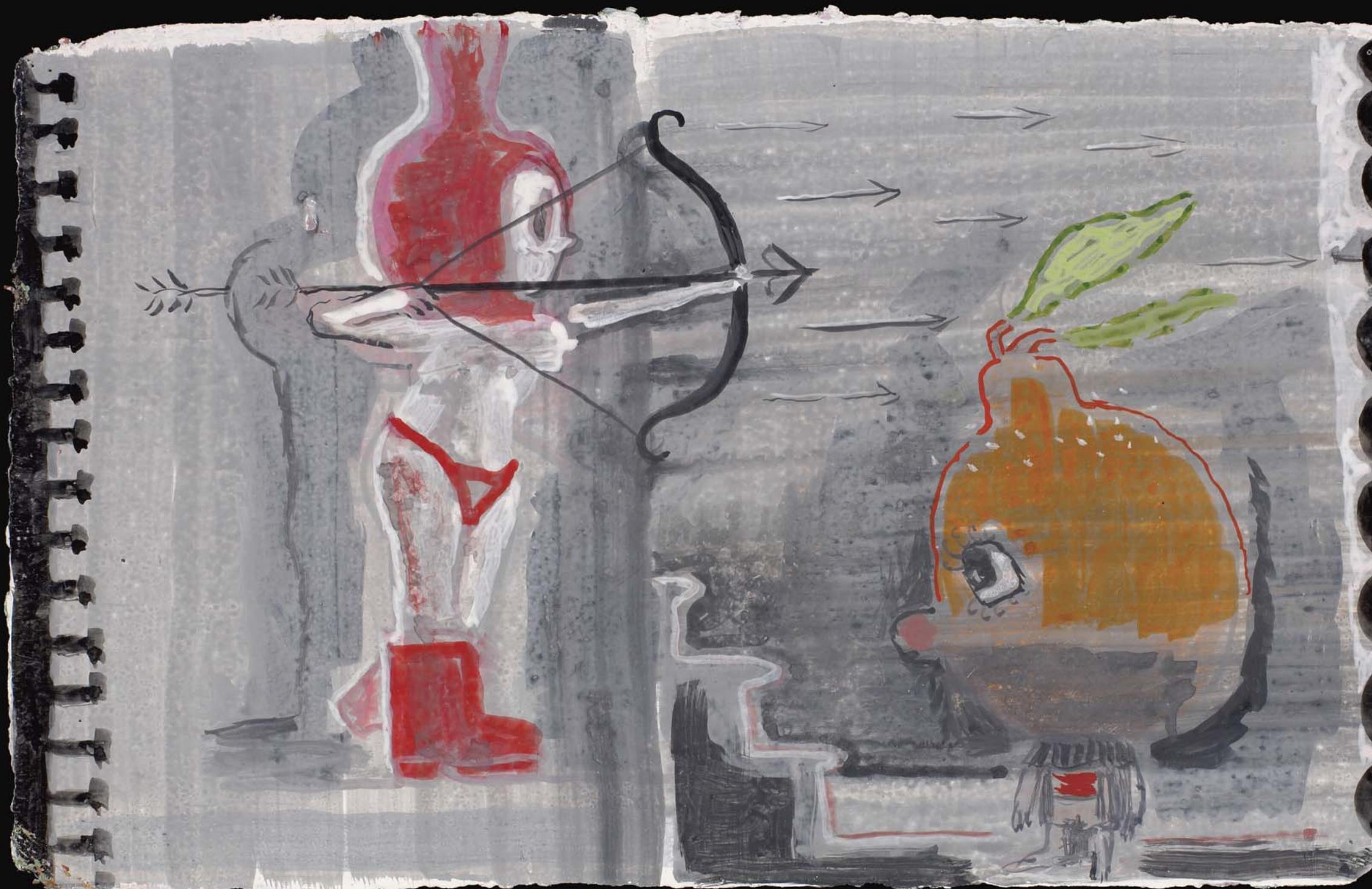


Left, top to bottom.

Elena Sisto. *The Bardo*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches; *Mesh*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches; *Did I Miss My Cue*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches

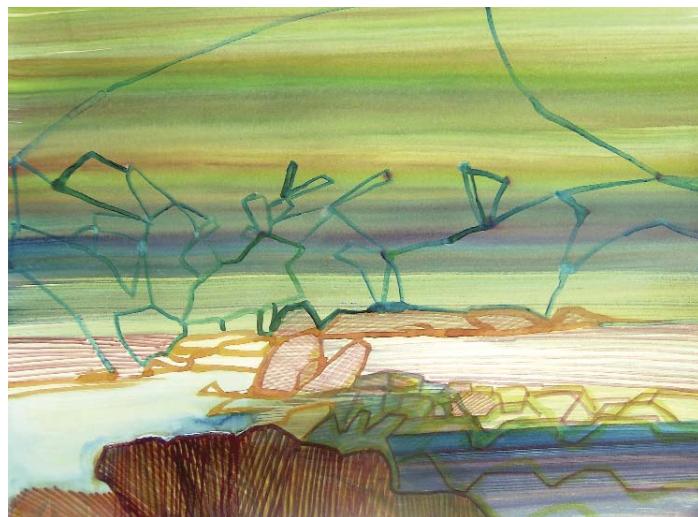
Above:

*Paisley Fall*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches;



Elena Sisto. *Did I Miss My Cue*, 2007–08. Mixed water media on paper, 12 x 17 inches

Josette Urso

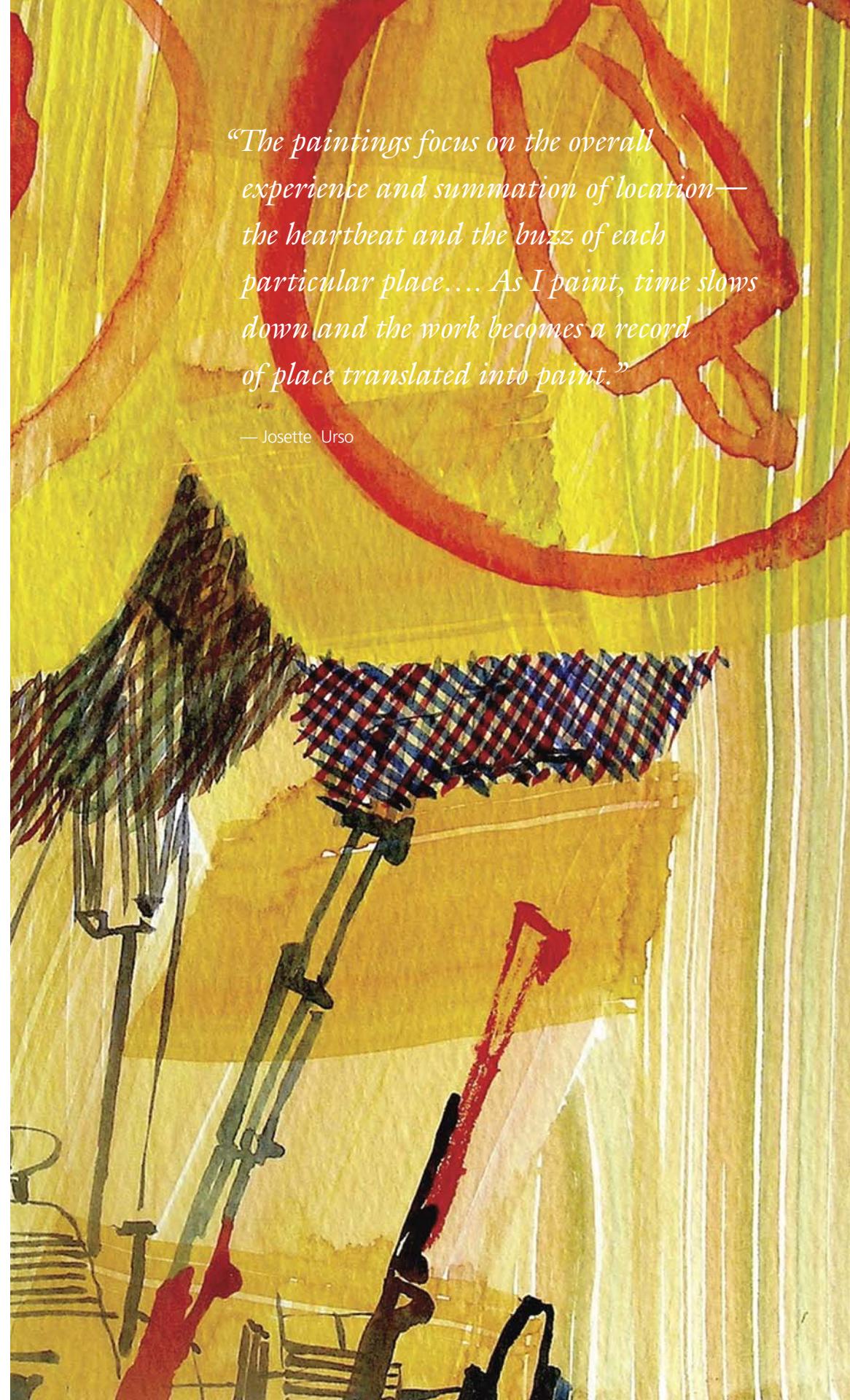


Josette Urso works with the **inherent properties of watercolor**—its aqueous flows and swirls, its translucent tints and washes, not to mention its portability—to create paintings that seem, in parts, to be composed directly out of color and light. This feeling of immaterial illumination, what legendary art critic Michael Fried describes as opticality, arguably connects Urso to the traditions of 19th century Impressionism. Like painters such as Claude Monet and Georges Seurat, Urso works *in situ* to capture a subjective and momentary impression of a place. She also utilizes similar strategies, such as color complements and diffuse brushwork, to efface the perceived materiality of the finished representation. As Monet presented the French pastoral as a palette of pastels, Urso here captures the iridescent luster of the Mediterranean in aqueous greens and blues.

This body of work also demonstrates **gestural and textural effects** that the Impressionists would never have countenanced. Take, for example, *Sunset at Port Ligat*. This image has as its backdrop the optical tissue of twilight—refracted through the clouds and reflected off of the water—depicted as tremulous striations of greens, reds and magentas. But closer to the foreground, the tangible sense of materiality reasserts itself into this diaphanous scene. The form of the rocky coast appears in the heavily cross-hatched brown rocks at the bottom and then in the protrusion of additional, semi-submerged rocks closer to the horizon. Above these forms sits the highly abstract,

*“The paintings focus on the overall experience and summation of location—the heartbeat and the buzz of each particular place.... As I paint, time slows down and the work becomes a record of place translated into paint.”*

— Josette Urso



Above: Josette Orso. *Sunset at Port Ligat*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 17 x 21 inches (framed)  
Opposite: Detail of *Gelato*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches. Full image on back cover



gestural line that occupies much of the top half of the picture. The shape of this aqua-green delineation is informed both by the rocky forms below as well as the cartographic contours of the coastal landscape itself.

This balance, between **gossamer illumination and textured tactility**, is struck in numerous variations across the selection of work on display here. Whether between the unearthly rose-hued wash of the water and the coarse, hunter-green daubs in *Sponge Sea at Port Lligat* or the myriad visual and haptic effects in the 24 work suite, Urso's paintings delicately dance between substance and luminance, between physicality and the evanescence of light.

— Mike Maizels



Above, top to bottom. Josette Orso. *Tourquoise Sea at Port Lligat*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 17 x 21 inches (framed). *Sponge Sea at Port Lligat*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 17 x 21 inches (framed).

Opposite. Detail of *Cetara Bloom*, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 6 x 6 inches. Full image on back cover

Kathy Muehleman

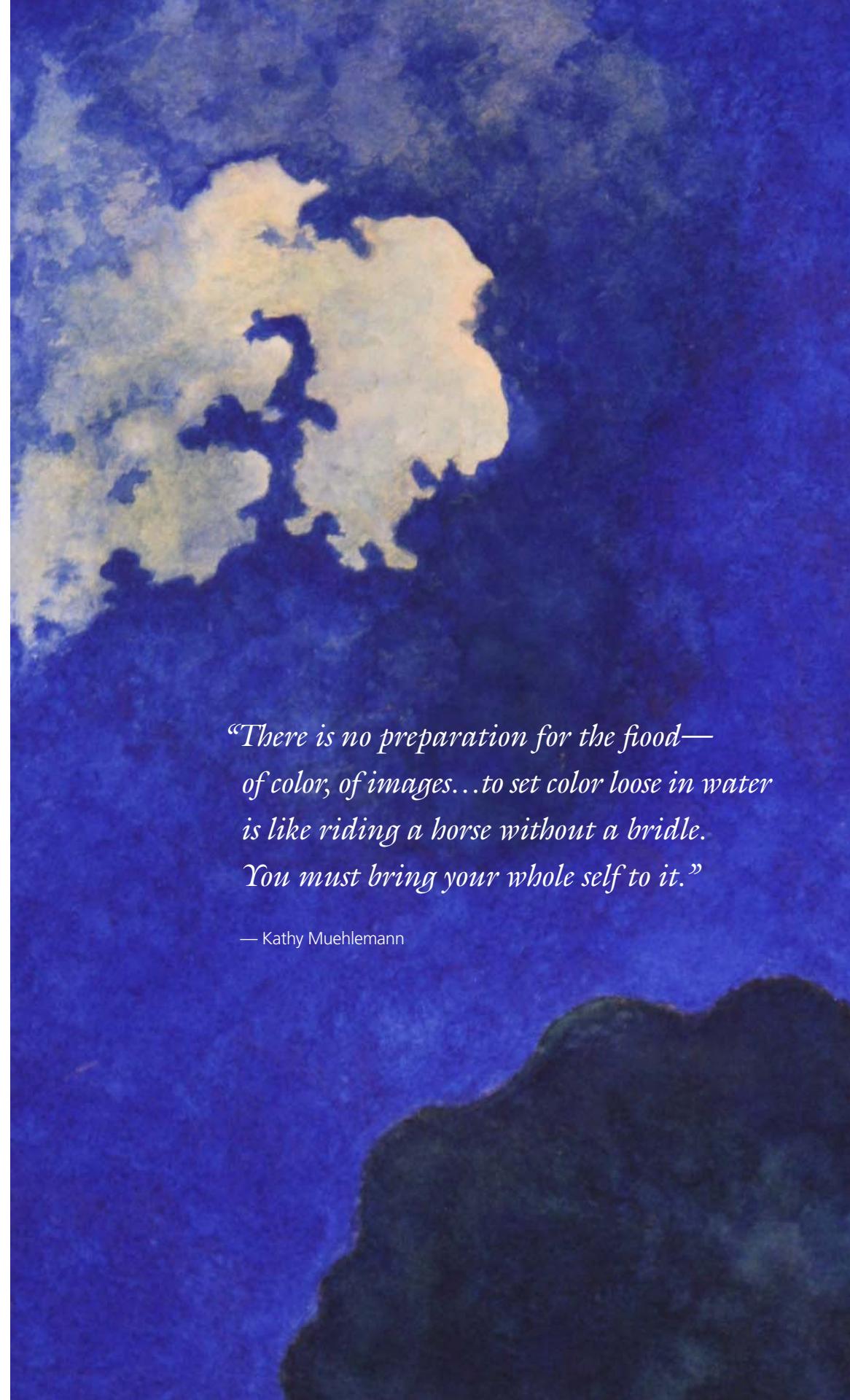


Reminiscent of traditional Chinese landscape painting as well as the stain paintings of Helen Frankenthaler, Kathy Muehlmann's watercolor-based abstractions **waver between form and dissolution** like a cloud of vapor in a gentle breeze. A puff of white mist floats languidly in the top left corner of each image, appearing almost as the exhalation of an invisible spirit. This billowing form appears caught in an updraft above the amorphous dark mass that generates a partial sense of gravity in each the compositions. This white billow and dark mass seem to swirl around one another, adrift in an expansive field of powdery blue that is equally evocative of the azure of the sea and the cerulean of the sky.

This trio of images rewards careful notation of the details which differentiate them. While the white whiff of *Chinese Cloud* is soft and pillow-like, in *Chinese Dragon Cloud* it has become much more jagged and angular, perhaps creating the contours of a dragon's head seen from above. The blue expanse in *Titian's Cloud* is marbled with white—suggesting the interpenetration of the white haze and the blue field—while the other images present a more uniform blue backdrop that sits optically underneath the other forms. Other, smaller differences arise from the contingencies of the media, the way that the smallest droplets of pigment-laden water settle on, and suffuse through, the paper support. This **variation-within-repetition** calls for an observational attentiveness that leads to a calm, almost meditative, kind of contemplation.

— Mike Maizels

Above, left to right. Kathy Muehleman. *Chinese Cloud*, 2007. Watercolor, 9 x 8 inches; *Chinese Dragon Cloud*, 2007. Watercolor, 9 x 8 inches; *Titian's Cloud*, 2007. Watercolor, 9 x 8 inches  
Opposite. Detail of *Chinese Dragon Cloud*



*"There is no preparation for the flood—  
of color, of images...to set color loose in water  
is like riding a horse without a bridle.  
You must bring your whole self to it."*

— Kathy Muehlemann



Kathy Muehlemann. *Chinese Cloud*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 9 x 8 inches



Kathy Muehlemann. *Titian's Cloud*, 2007. Watercolor on paper, 9 x 8 inches

## Linda Marston-Reid

In this trio of works, Linda Marston-Reid applies her **delicate and spontaneous sensibility**—cultivated over many years painting the California deserts—to the landscape of her new home in Brooklyn. This immigration suggests comparison with Georgia O'Keefe, another painter that worked between the deserts of the West and the dense metropolis of New York. But while O'Keefe's images of the city often celebrate the dense monumentality of the urban fabric, Marston-Reid's maintain the airy feel of Western expanse. Marston-Reid steps above the normally crowded, even claustrophobic, experience of the city streets to paint the rooftops in panorama. *Urban Rooftops* is evocative of a kind of psychedelic desert landscape; the undulating distortions of the buildings seem to turn them into phantasmagorical examples of desert flora. And yet the most direct link with the arid terrain of California is the persistence of Marston-Reid's desert touchstone, the Joshua tree. This iconic plant makes its ghostly reappearance in *Urban Joshua*, as it floats above the city in a jagged starburst.

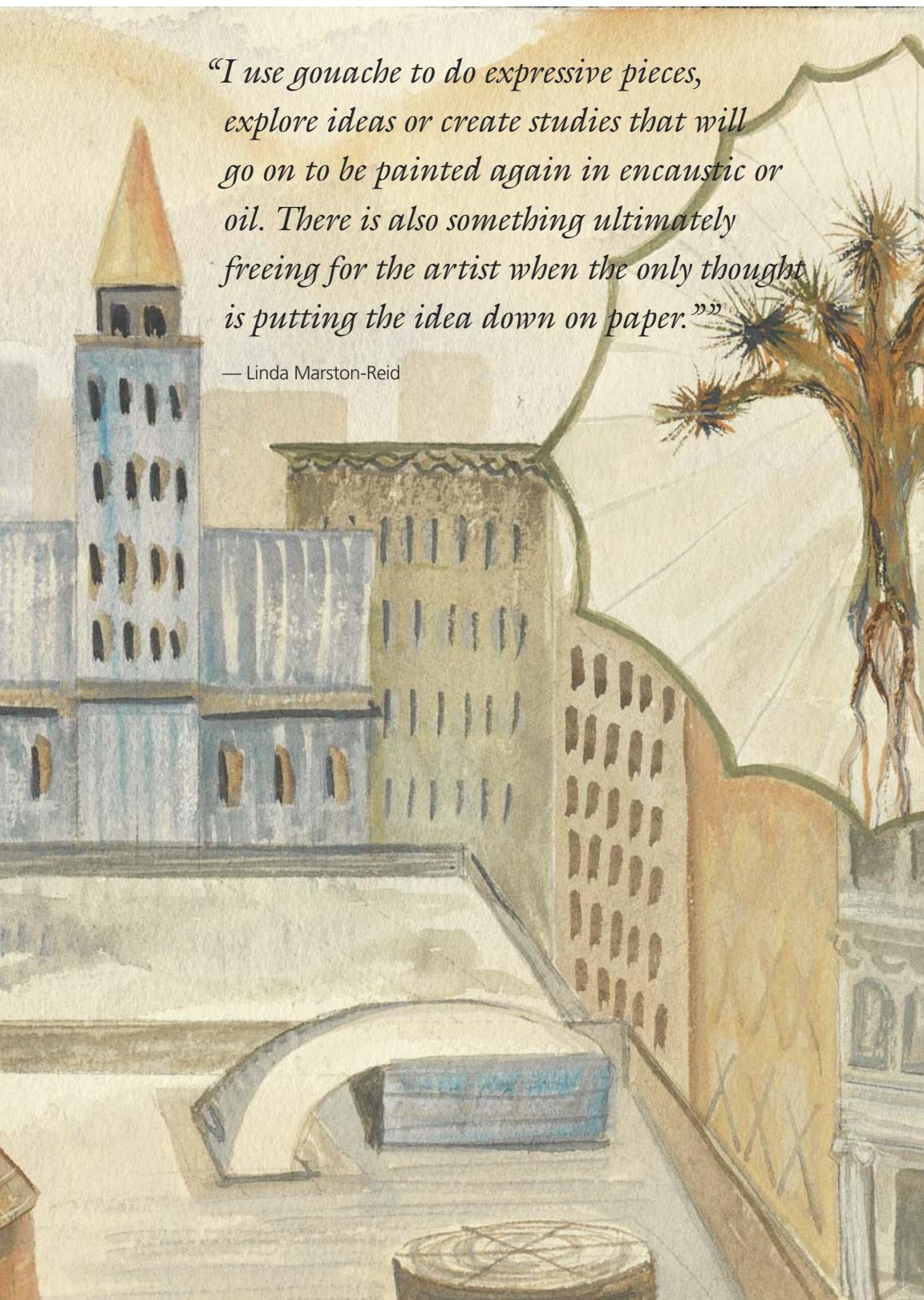
These works also buzz with a **distinctly urban energy**, an energy that eyes new to the metropolis are uniquely able to appreciate. In *Urban Joshua*, the haloed tree bears an uncanny resemblance to a sparkplug, perhaps alluding to the electrical life-force of the city that is typically relegated to conduits buried deep within walls or sidewalks. The buildings in *Urban Rooftops*, which bear a resemblance to fantastical desert plants, also appear to be gyrating to the urban energy of music: jazz on the street corners, the radios (or iPod docks) of blaring rooftop parties or just the collective hum of city life. In *Urban Future*, this energy seems to have crystallized in the wash of painted fireworks sparkling over the East River.

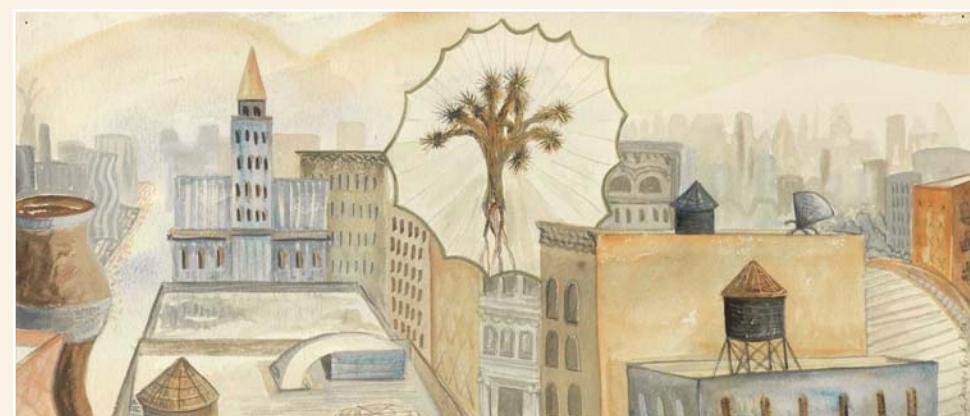
—Mike Maizels

Right. Linda Marston-Reid. Detail of *Urban Rooftops*, 2003. Gouache on Arches paper, 8 x 22 inches

*"I use gouache to do expressive pieces, explore ideas or create studies that will go on to be painted again in encaustic or oil. There is also something ultimately freeing for the artist when the only thought is putting the idea down on paper."*

— Linda Marston-Reid





Above, top to bottom. Linda Marston-Reid. *Urban Joshua*, 2003. Watercolor and ink on Arches paper, 8 x 18 inches; *Urban Future*, 2004. Gouache on Arches paper, 7 x 11 inches; *Urban Future*, 2003. Gouache on Arches paper, 8 x 22 inches  
Opposite. Detail of *Urban Future*, 2003. Gouache on Arches paper, 8 x 22 inches



#### Colophon

Design  
Anne Chesnut  
Charlottesville VA

Printing  
Worth Higgins Associates, Inc  
Richmond VA

Stock  
Finch xxxx 80# text and cover

Type  
Galliard and Frutiger

uva | McIntire Department of Art

University of Virginia  
P.O. Box 400130  
Rugby Road  
Charlottesville VA 22904

[www.virginia.edu/art](http://www.virginia.edu/art)

