

An abstract painting featuring a complex composition of colors and textures. The lower half is dominated by thick, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of blue and teal, creating a sense of movement and depth. The upper half is a mix of muted earth tones, including greys, browns, and blacks, with numerous small, bright yellow and orange spots scattered throughout, resembling splatters or small flowers. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and layered meaning.

Anne Neely

ANNE NEELY

LOOKING NOW

September 1 - October 15, 2023

Essay by Christopher Crosman

Aperto Fine Art

63 Main Street, Bridgton, Maine 04009
(207) 291-4245 www.apertofineart.com
thegallery@apertofineart.com

Anne Neely: Looking Now

“A picture lives by companionship... It’s a risky act to send it out into the world.” Mark Rothko in RED by John Logan

Not since Frederic Church’s *Twilight in the Wilderness*, (1860) or Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* (1893) has the color red in a painting seemed so portentous, prescient. Church’s mid-19th century masterpiece, based on an earlier trip to Maine, has been seen by historians as harbinger of catastrophic conflagration on the eve of Civil War, but also as elegy to the loss of American “wildness,” even then threatened by industrial development. And Munch’s intensely saturated red sky suggested to later scientists that his painting is an accurate portrayal of Scandinavian atmospheric effects after the 1883 explosion of the Krakatoa Volcano in the South Pacific that tinted skies a deep red for at least a decade afterwards.

For Neely, her orange-red upward release and seething surface in *Evening View* is both metaphorical and factual. It can be about the way paint looks and feels at a time when the act of painting cannot escape a damaged world under existential threat from climate change. Paintings that suggest firestorms and sun flares are only the outward associations we, the viewers, might bring to color and touch that, absent associations and current context, are beautifully rendered, dance-like in their rhythms and whipping

energy. Neely and her unique painterly processes rehearse nature's own: release and renewal; mother and destroyer of worlds. This is to say her personal, private points of view are manifested in a practice of pouring, splattering, pushing and pulling paint across flat surfaces until it says something to her. And then, doing it again, and yet again, to let layers of color seep into and under each other and to allow forms to build upon one another, organically, naturally. Dense and controlled, her paintings are tough, hard-won, difficult to fully apprehend. They are personal and local, but not private.

Neely is among those artists born during the middle decades of the 20th century, often derided and dismissed as "Boomers." But, Neely is also among that generation of artists who emerged at the height of the Vietnam and Civil Rights eras amidst the rise of protest around women's rights, and whose work often navigated between personal experience and collective, media-saturated memory. They include such different and differently focused and inspired artists as Elizabeth Murray, Ree Morton, Susan Rothenberg, Lynda Benglis, Celeste Roberge, Dozier Bell and Katherine Bradford, among others. Indeed, it is the women of this generation (many with Maine ties) whose work has become, well, generative for a whole new generation of artists working at the frayed edges of contemporary figuration and abstraction and whose work often references personal relationships to materials, media, the natural world, and domestic life. In the teeth of male dominated 1970s and 80s Minimalism and Pop, women artists, like Neely, looked to organic abstraction to describe and comment on issues from climate change to

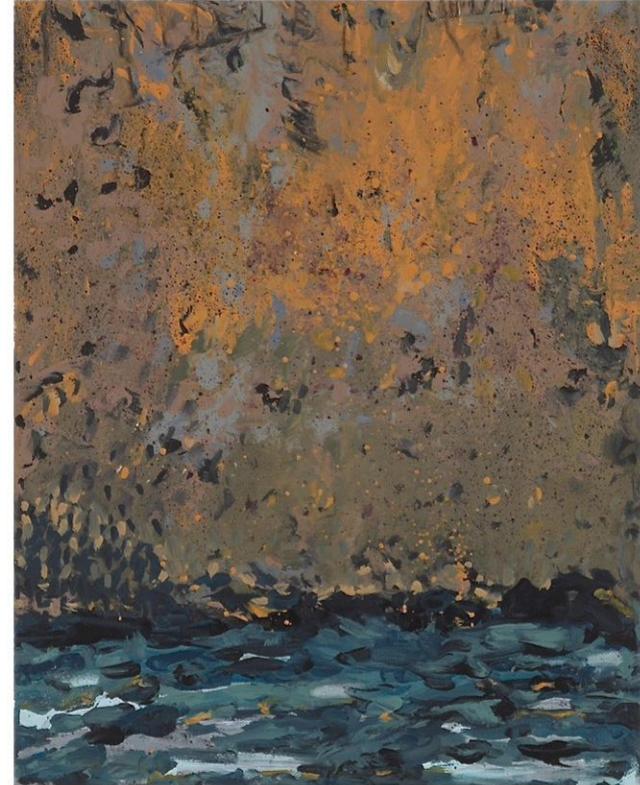
reproductive rights to feminist and racial diversity and equality. Most, like Neely and several of her own students (including Sarah Sze) and associates from Massachusetts and Maine continue to make art as if lives depend on it. For Neely, and those who care to look now and to think deeply, they do.

Neely recently observed, "I find purpose in the conversation I have with paint, and I try to find a balance between beauty and foreboding in my work." Unless we look closely at this small painting where agitated brushstrokes and angry reds and oranges collide, we might not notice the thin, bottom edge is a burnt, charred wasteland, a low horizon of blackened, indeterminate remains of "an evening view," our own twilight in the wilderness. Then, in another small panel, *At the Edge*, she gives us its watery reciprocal, a rising, roiling sea under a mist-laden, shroud-like and shredded curtain lifting over a distant, uncertain horizon. Unlike poetry or dance or theater, painting can make us see two things at once—at the edge where conversations about foreboding and healing grace can begin.

Christopher Crosman

Thomaston, Maine, August, 2023

AT THE EDGE
2023, Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches



CURRENT
2023, Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches



EVENING VIEW
2023, Oil on Linen, 11 x 14 inches



OVERFLOW
2023, Oil on Linen, 11 x 14 inches



WHEN WERE WE HERE
2023, Oil on Linen, 48 x 60 inches



FROM ABOVE
2023, Oil on Linen, 60 x 48 inches



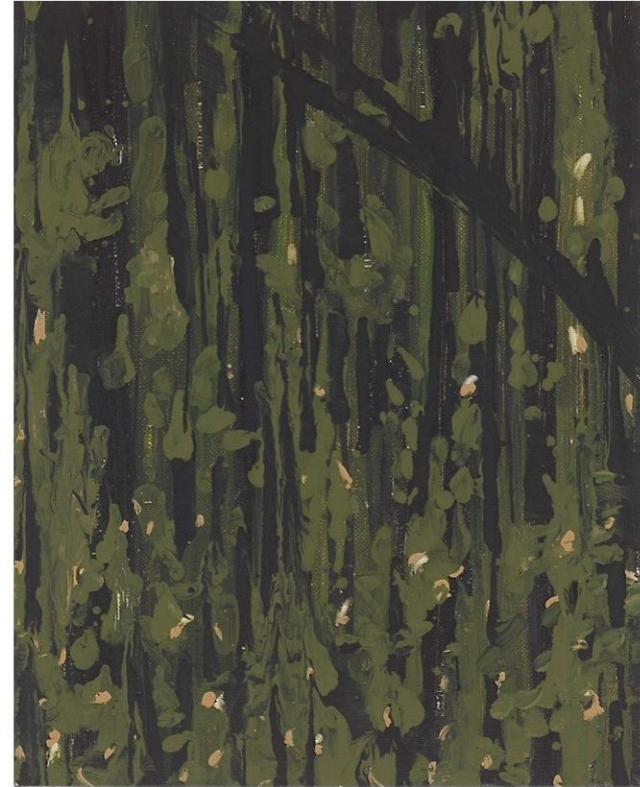
AFTER
2023, Oil on Linen, 36 x 44 inches



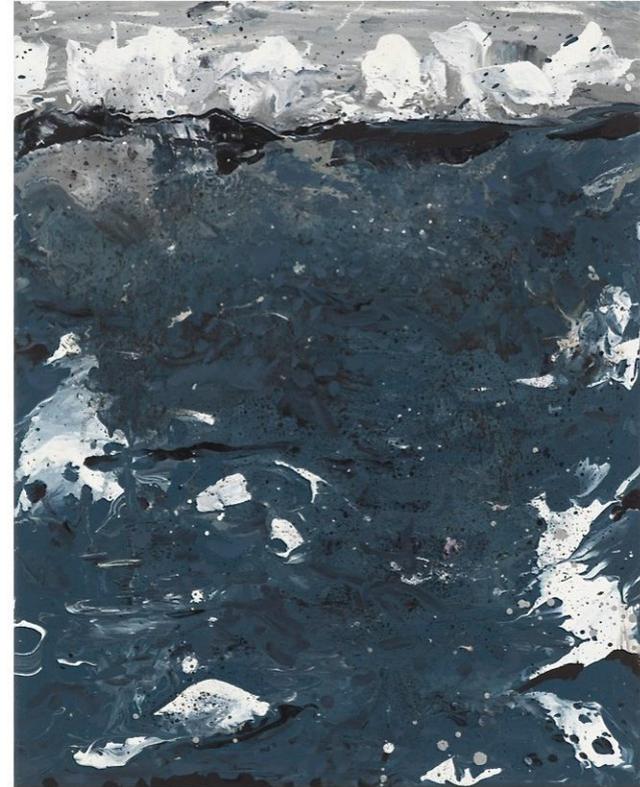
PRIMAL FIRE
2023, Oil on Linen, 56 x 72 inches



WOODS
2023, Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches



SUMMER THAW
2023, Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches



WHAT REMAINS
2023, Oil on Linen, 72 x 56 inches



UNRAVELLING
2023, Oil on Linen, 72 x 56 inches



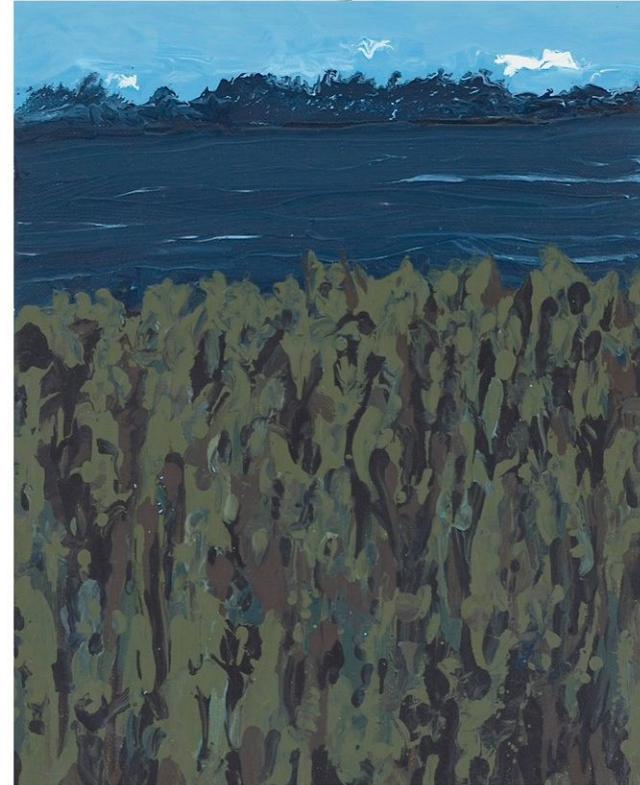
O CANADA
2023, Oil on Linen, 11 x 14 inches



IN THE FOG
2023, Oil on Linen, 11 x 14 inches



ELLA'S VIEW
2023, Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches





CHRISTOPHER CROSMAN was director of the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine from 1988 to 2005, and the founding chief curator of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. As a young museum educator in the early 1970's, Crosman learned about the importance of place to the work of most artists when he co-directed The Video Vasari, a ground-breaking on location video interview program. Crosman lives in Thomaston, Maine and occasionally writes about artists with Maine ties.

ARTIST BIO FOR ANNE NEELY 2023

Anne Neely is a painter who divides her time between Boston, Massachusetts and Jonesport, Maine. She has won awards for painting, most notably a finalist for the Prix de Rome and twice a finalist for the MASS Cultural Council Fellowship. Her work has been shown in galleries and museums in New York City, New England, the West Coast and Ireland. In 2014 she had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Science, Boston entitled *Water Stories*, one of the first exhibitions of its kind about water issues in this country. Neely's work can be found in the collections of The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, The Farnsworth Museum, Rockland, Maine, The Federal Reserve Collection, Washington DC, Grenwald Center for Graphic Art, UCLA, CA, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA, The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, The Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, and The Whitney Museum, New York, NY among others. Her exhibitions have been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Art News*, *The New York Times*, and *The Irish Times*.

Left: EVENING VIEW, 2023, Oil on Linen, 11 x 14 inches

Acknowledgments

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Anne Neely

Text: Christopher Crosman
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Aperto Fine Art, LLC
63 Main Street, Bridgton, Maine 04009
www.apertofineart.com
thegallery@apertofineart.com
(207) 291-4245

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