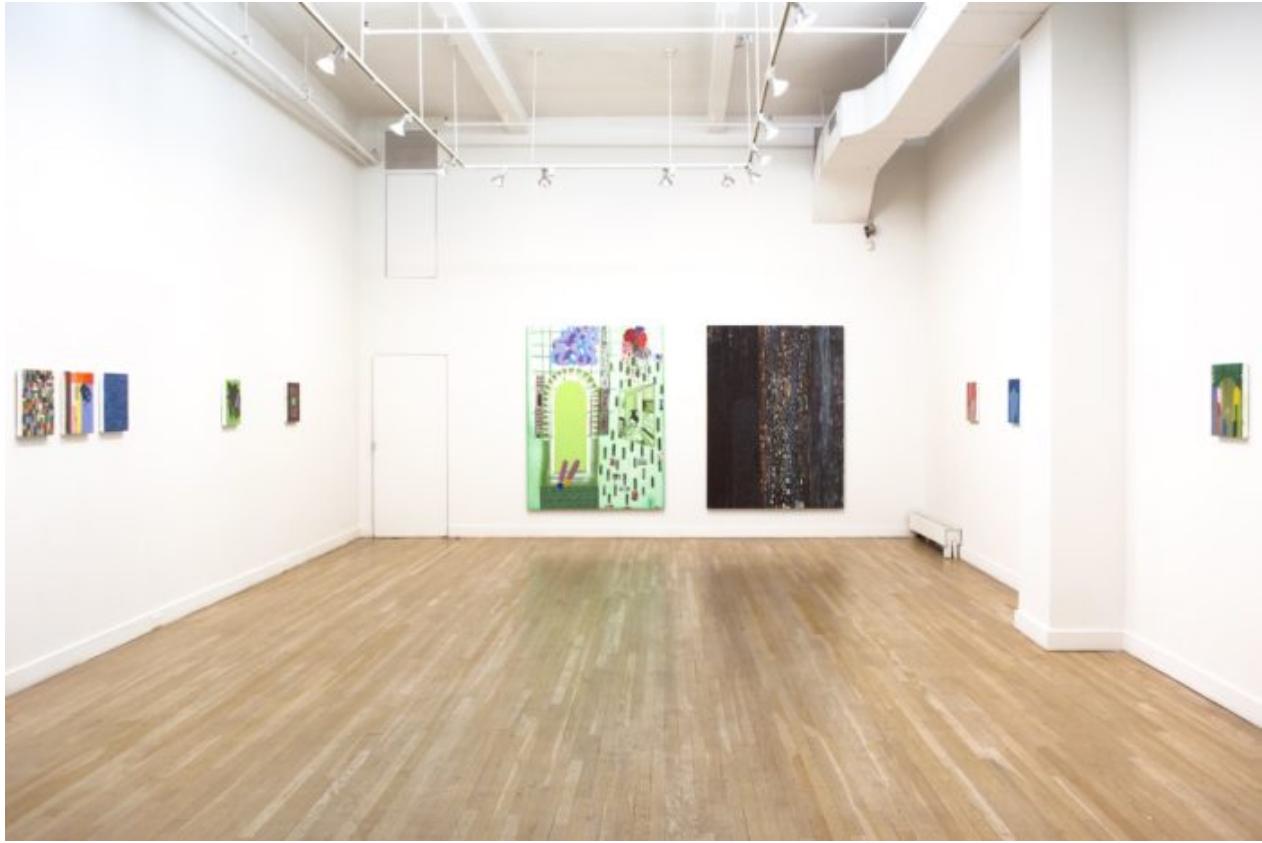


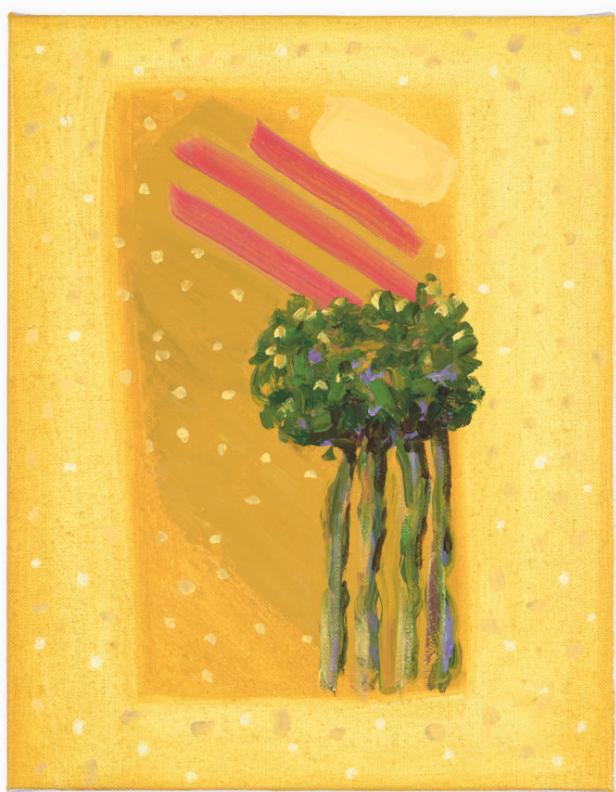
Anne Neely at the Cue Art Foundation

NOVEMBER 21, 2017 by [JONATHAN GOODMAN](#)



Anne Neely at the Cue Art Foundation, installation view, New York.

Anne Neely's fine show of partially abstract, partially figurative paintings indicates her ongoing resolve to push both categories of art into a new place. Perhaps she accomplishes this with the decision to fuse the two ways of seeing; landscapes, heads, and organically nonfigurative shapes make their way across the canvases, in a manner that displays a real playfulness and ingenuity. Interestingly, the paintings do not repeat themselves; the images forego the reiteration we often see in contemporary art. Instead, the paintings convey singular intention. Recognizable shapes vie with a style whose lyric abstraction frames the artist's well-felt intuition for color and a self-generated structure. As a result, the paintings build their own bridge of communication, sometimes edging toward a highly developed, highly recognizable landscape; and sometimes bringing to the fore abstract effects that tend to dehumanize the artist's overall plan. This play of opposites, its premonition of a style that is eclectic but independent in its pervasive openness, makes it clear that Neely wants to display both painterly intelligence and emotional depth.



Clockwise from top left: *Portrait of the Artist*, 2016. Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches; *Dynamic Stability*, 2017. Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches; *A Simple Painting*, 2017. Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches; *Sweet Sorrow*, 2016. Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches.

Portrait of the Artist (2016) is a painting with a large black column with a rounded head; it extends three-quarters of the way up. A face can be seen toward the top of the column, which is surrounded by a green background with a variety of abstract effects: on the left, near the top, there are gray passages, while on the right, also on the top, one sees black dots, which overlap two grayish masses. These dots continue downward toward a mass of white lines. The various passages and embellishments indicate Neely's interest in the way a work of art can be made busy, while the black column, rising ghost-like into the abstract field, stands forthrightly as a declaration of self—albeit a self tinged with more than a little darkness. The portrait is a painting of unusual complexity; it is more symbolic than real. Yet It presents a genuine persona to the audience. In high contrast is the small but brightly hued painting called *Dynamic Stability* (2017); its abstract title calls attention to the composition, which consists of a broad spectrum of colorful stripes, most of them vertically oriented. It is highly structured, unlike the self-portrait. It is also a developmental treatment of color, balanced, oddly enough, by its variety.

A Simple Painting (2017) is exactly that: an uncomplicated treatment of four tree trunks leading upward into a single rectangle of foliage, dotted with yellow flowers on the top and bits of brown in the center of the greenery. Three orange-red lines occur above the green mass, while to the left, yellow blossoms seem to be falling from the sky. The frame around the image is broad and of the same yellow color as the flowers. The oddity of the four trunks being subsumed into a single accumulation of vegetation adds to the painting's charm. It is hard today to paint so optimistically! Contemporary art no longer genuflects before romanticism, but this painting observes the pieties of untrammeled feeling.

Perhaps Neely's emphasis on emotion is the best way of understanding her stance. In her short artist's statement, she refers to her various roles in life, and in each case she illustrates that role with an adjective that indicates her sense of purpose and suggests feeling. The title of a 2016 painting, *Sweet Sorrow*, obviously conveys feeling; most of the painting is blue, the color we usually associate with melancholy. The painting is taken up with a grid, while in the middle is another ghostly column with a rounded top, but one of transparently white color. It looks like there are two legs at the bottom of the form; next to it is a ladder-like structure in yellow. If the painting is truly an act of sadness, and according to the title it is, it is also one devoted to the painful joy accompanying it.

Neely's art, in its emphasis on feeling, is an art for our time. Her bias does not mean that she lacks ambition; instead, it is a reading of the various states of solicitude that accompany the events that occur in our lives—and our roles in stewarding these events are also an important part of the way we make use of them in art. *Just Looking* (2017) may be the right title to describe Neely's paintings; this abstract work consists of a dense white grid imposed on a midnight-blue background, which peeks through the interwoven lines. The title and the painting's small size

belie the accomplishment of the composition, which is startlingly satisfying in its presentation of a contemporary art organizational tool. Usually, we think of a grid as conceptual in nature, but Neely has managed to turn it into something physically tangible and emphatically real. This is what she does again and again in this exhibition, which relays her enjoyment with life. Painting, it is implied, is part of a life well lived. That the artist has painted so well and lived so exuberantly attests to the tenacity—and the flair—of her gift.

Anne Neely: Hidden in Plain Sight
Curated by Sarah Sze

November 2 – December 16, 2017

-Jonathan Goodman

Photographs provided by the CUE Art Foundation



Anne Neely, *Just Looking*, 2017. Oil on Linen, 14 x 11 inches.