

As the Scene Unfolds: Recent Paintings by Celia Neubauer

Celia Neubauer's paintings begin with relatively tranquil landscape scenes that become interrupted by flowing layers of stark forms and vivid colours. By conjoining these two divergent approaches, the paintings in the exhibition *Exit, Enter* contain a particular type of energy that holds viewers at full attention.

The circular openings that recur in Neubauer's paintings reference the "moon gate" passageways commonly incorporated into Chinese gardens. Apertures are key elements of these garden designs, where points of exit and entry, and windows into particular scenes or viewing angles, are given much consideration. Neubauer adopts this aspect by orchestrating particular views of her garden scenes, letting their initial composition dictate the overall direction of her painting in terms of which elements of the scene eventually become obscured from view.

In these recent works, Neubauer has adopted Photoshop tools to generate the morphed forms that push across her canvases. Using found imagery from magazines and media, often of brilliantly coloured or lushly textured objects, she renders the original sources unrecognizable through a warping tool that allows her to craft new forms. The overall shapes are applied through handmade stencils that divide the canvas into hard-edged planes and then the computerized forms are reinterpreted in paint. A digital aesthetic is still recognizable in the final product, creating a palpable tension between the loose brushwork of the landscapes and the more calculated approach to the abstract forms that break their surfaces.

In her deft blend of murky, softly rendered garden views and graphic overlays, Neubauer consistently presents the viewer with contrasting configurations that refuse to allow the eye to settle in any one location. In this sense, they are not unlike the canvases of American painter Charline von Heyl. Writer Kristy Bell notes of von Heyl's works that "the spatial leaps, false starts and abrupt changes of direction or mood in these paintings create a sense of questioning and instability that keeps the viewer alert." In the process of absorbing Neubauer's scenes, the eye is constantly flitting back and forth between the tranquil and the vibrant, between that which is loosely rendered and that which borders on sharp-edged graphic design. In addition to von Heyl, Neubauer has noted the influence of American painter Pat Steir in terms of her incorporation of historical influences, mainly traditional Asian painting, in her equally dynamic arrangements.

Neubauer describes her own paint technique as an unfolding of forms, similar to the action of manipulating swaths of fabric. The paintings in *Exit, Enter* are notable for their cut-and-paste aesthetic, one that integrates diverse, almost paradoxical techniques. As a contemporary take on collage, these works pair a richly historical painting tradition with

a current digital technique, creating singular compositions that continually move the viewer within, around and between these two worlds.

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