

ENCOURAGING THOUGHTFUL PERCEPTION
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ELIZABETH CHANDLER: RECENT WORK

We associate gestural and spontaneity in painting with the Abstract Expressionists of a half-century ago. Caking their canvases with vulcan outpourings of oil-based pigment, the heroes (and occasional heroines) of the New York and San Francisco schools set a standard for a renewed American transcendentalism. But the same standard had been set, if at a more restrained scale, in central Europe two generations previous with, among others, the fluid rhapsodies of Vasily Kandinsky and the virtuosic whimsy of Paul Klee.

It is to this more intimate, if no less visionary, standard that Elizabeth Chandler sets her own. Her apparitions depend, as the Europeans' did, on a drawn line that survives into her paintings (and, by implication, are even preserved in the encaustic skin she gives many of her works). Taking us, to paraphrase Klee, for a walk with her lines, Chandler describes a universe of landscape. Mountains and rivers suggest themselves in surging, meandering profile; by contrast, human presence – readily apparent in the images spun from “Georgia’s Dream,” somewhat more hidden in the Tellurian series – infers in more compact, angular incidents.

If there is an American model for Chandler’s approach, it is Georgia O’Keeffe’s and Arthur Dove’s. For these and other early American abstractionists, expression derived from a pictorial rather than corporeal response to space; they were *in* nature, not simply

of it. Indeed, their art could be considered a negotiation between natural and acculturated states of consciousness, as can Chandler's. She neither simply looks at the land nor simply takes on its energy, but dives into it spiritually, her brush and pen impelled by topography and foliage at once seen and invented.

“Who goes there/hankering, gross, mystical, nude?” Walt Whitman asked, defining the questing, wandering spirit of the original American avant garde, a spirit in which the individual blurs, but never loses, the definition between him/herself and the land. This spirit manifests once more in Elizabeth Chandler's recent paintings and drawings, as expansive, for their restrained scale, as they are personal.

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