

Pat Steir

Press Release

November 9 through December 22. Opening Friday, November 9 from 6 to 8 pm.

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of recent paintings by Pat Steir. The show is accompanied by a full color catalogue with an essay by the poet Anne Waldman.

Pat Steir was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1940. She had her first solo exhibition at Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York, in 1964, only a few years after receiving her BFA from Pratt Institute in 1962. She has shown continually since that time, steadily creating a body of work informed by her interest in art history and influenced by 19th century Romanticism, Abstract Expressionism, Japanese woodcuts and, most importantly, Chinese landscape paintings of the Song and Tang dynasties. She is best-recognized for her loosely dripped and splashed “waterfall” paintings, which she began in the late eighties with *Waterfall Painted with the Chinese in Mind*. She continues to investigate and refine her painting techniques, and the new works exhibited at Cheim & Read reflect an ongoing exploration of her concerns.

In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Anne Waldman cites *proprioception*—the unconscious perception of one's self moving through space—as a defining term for Steir's work. Steir's painting is undoubtedly related to space and the physical body; the canvas' large scale (most of the paintings in this exhibition measure 127 ¼ x 109 ¼ inches) provides ample surface for the evidence of her artistic gesture. But Steir's relationship with the canvas also has an unconscious sensibility; the physical nature of her work is defined by unseen elements as well. Paint is pulled downwards by gravity and elongated by the passing of time, its direction and destination determined by serendipitous meanderings. Steir flings the paint through the air, pours it down the canvas, or starts it dripping with a paint-saturated brush. Paths of paint, merging and separating according to their natural journey over the canvas, result in beautiful variations of drips and washes, creating subtle stratum of overlapped color. The influence of Chinese painting traditions on Steir's work is especially evident in her process: of note are the inky marks of the 8th and 9th century *Yi-pin* “ink-splashing” painters. The *Yi-pin* employed a technique in which free-form ink splatterings created evocative, abstract shapes, the paintings' compositions reliant on an undirected impact and flow of splashed ink.

Steir's interest in Asian art is further linked to an understanding of Taoism and Taoist philosophy's concern for a connection between man, nature and the elemental world. Positioning nature and physical science as active participants in her work, Steir allows chance to take some responsibility in its outcome. As she noted to Waldman for the catalogue essay: “...all of these paintings are in some way nature paintings.” Though Steir has an acknowledged sense of how she intends for a painting to look, her work is ultimately dependent on the mysterious external forces of the physical world; she directs the paint through the decisive gesture and determined timing of its placement, but then she herself must wait to see the result. As she states: “The thing that I always have to force myself to do is let the paint hit the canvas, walk away and let it do its thing...If I watch, I'll meddle in it.”

Paintings in the exhibition, all made in 2007, capture a radiating, almost spiritual, beauty. Steir's work, tied to nature and the progression of time with, as she noted, “gravity and levity” as partners, provide the viewer with respite in their calm physicality. Compounded with the eastern philosophies and painting traditions that have influenced her, one is left with an understanding of transience, the fleeting nature of beauty, and the delicate fragility of the natural world. An awareness of our unconscious “moving through space” as tied to nature provides us with a precious desire to protect it.

“I Am As You Will Be” remains on view through November 3. For additional information please contact us by calling 212-242-7727, faxing 212-242-7737, or emailing gallery@cheimread.com.

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