

NOVEMBER 2 – DECEMBER 16, 2017

**ANNE
NEELY**

CUE

137 WEST 25TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10001

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Hidden in Plain Sight

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CUE Art Foundation is a visual arts center dedicated to creating essential career and educational opportunities for artists of all ages. Through exhibitions, arts education, and public programs, CUE provides artists, writers, and audiences with sustaining, meaningful experiences and resources.

CUE’s exhibition program aims to present new and exceptionally strong work by under-recognized and emerging artists based in the United States, and is committed to exhibiting work of all disciplines from living artists. Exhibiting artists are selected via a hybrid process, featuring solo exhibitions curated by established artists, alongside a series of solo and group exhibitions selected by an annual Open Call. In line with CUE’s commitment to providing substantive professional development opportunities, curators and Open Call panelists also serve as mentors to the exhibiting artists, providing support throughout the process of developing the exhibition. We are honored to work with artist Sarah Sze as the curator of this exhibition.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

ANNE NEELY

For over four decades I have cherished the transformative act of making art. For many years my paintings were about beauty and foreboding in the natural world, with an emphasis on water issues in the last decade. I have used my curiosity about this world to explore, respond to, reinvent, and express ideas through painting. Scientific knowledge was the base from which I began my paintings about the environment, and from there I would imagine. Now with far fewer days on the planet in front of me than behind, I have shifted my focus from the external world and turned inward, only to discover stories that have surrounded me all my life.

In my landscape and personal narrative paintings, I set up similar compositional structures that hold the same challenges. Using different points of view, my painting language is culled from countless mark makings of lines, rectangles and different forms honed during years of printmaking. When I approach a painting, I ask questions from which a painting is built. One might say that by placing one layer on top of another, my paintings come to life.

Although I remain deeply connected to Nature, I find that I disappear into the landscape. However, in these story paintings, I am front and center. The difference and experience of these current paintings is that I forage

emotional territory where extreme fear and joy join forces and become intimates. This connectivity between joy and fear has formed my life and the constant is my art. Now as I look back at experiences surrounding the curious child, the observant adolescent, the rebellious daughter, the adventurous teenager, the too young wife, the anxious single mother, the passionate woman, the tenacious artist, the emphatic teacher, the insistent environmentalist, the philosophical friend, the supportive partner, I find these stories are often awkward, comical, certainly emotional, and always surprising.

Stories thread all of us together, bound, one by one, into a necklace of connective energy that is our essential humanness. These stories, whether mine or yours, are “Hidden in Plain Sight” for all of us, and are rooted in the acknowledgement that life is an enigma. For me, understanding this is to be present. I am most present through painting, referencing memory, imagination and reverie.

Anne Neely is a painter and printmaker who spends her time between Boston, Massachusetts, and Jonesport, Maine. She has been twice a finalist for the Prix de Rome and recently was twice a finalist in painting for the MASS Cultural Council Fellowship. She has been awarded residencies at the Millay Colony for the Arts in New York, at the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in Co. Mayo, Ireland, and at the Cill Rialaig Arts Center in Co. Kerry, Ireland. Her work has been shown in galleries in New York, Boston, and California and in museums around the country. Most recently, she had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Science, Boston entitled *Water Stories*, about water issues in America. Neely’s work can be found in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; The Davis Museum, Wellesley, MA; The Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; The deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA; The Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, ME; Grunwald Center for Graphic Art, UCLA; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. Her work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Art News*, *The New York Times*, and *The Irish Times*, and a book has been published on her recent exhibition at the Museum of Science, Boston.

Special Thanks to the CUE Art Foundation staff, particularly Shona Masarin-Hurst and the Art Critic Mentoring Program coordinator, Lilly Wei, for all their support during the process of making this show happen. And to Sarah Sze without whom this wouldn’t be possible. Also thanks go to John A. Tyson and Suzette McAvoy for their insightful writing. In my life, thanks to Douglas Fricke, Mara Henze, Jonathan Franzen, Sheila Gallagher, Brad Bloom, Heidi Whitman, Kevin and Kris Musumano, Susan Heideman, Siddhartha Mukerjee, Elizabeth Awalt, Susan Paine, Harry Cooper, the late Carl Belz, Ro Lohin, Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz, Susan Stoops, Sidney Worthen, Anne Harris Bowron, Eloise Watt, Mary Armstrong, and the Yoga Girls.

SARAH SZE

CURATOR-MENTOR

“...when the brush finally goes where it’s supposed to go, that’s it.”
–Philip Guston

There is a sense when looking at Anne Neely’s paintings that the paint leaves the tube and reaches the canvas right in front of you, all over again. Neely has a singularly passionate relationship to the materiality of paint. Materiality—texture, weight, luminosity, hue—has been, for over the past fifty years, her primary concern, regardless of what subject we may name on the canvas. When Philip Guston was asked the subject of his work, he said: “It’s about. Freedom. That’s the only possession an artist has—freedom to do whatever you can imagine.”

Like Guston, living longer has only created a greater sense of freedom for Neely. With her new series, she seems to have discovered, or rediscovered, a sense of abandon and license for exploration.

Hidden in Plain Sight develops as a series, like the pages of an intimate account. And, like a diary, the vulnerability it embodies has the quality of embarrassment, in the best possible way. Guston recounts that it was Franz Kline who told him: “You know what creating really is? To have the capacity to be embarrassed.” Painting, he described, “is like hands stuck in a mattress.”

These are the paintings Neely would paint if no one was looking. Intimate in scale, they are raw, honest, and direct. They reveal a language with the desire to express, but they also talk to the limits of expression itself.

Sarah Sze is an artist living and working in New York City. Sze employs a constellation of materials to create works that question the value society places on materials and how meaning is ascribed to the places and times we inhabit. Sze was the representative for the United States at the Venice Biennale in 2013, and was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2003. She has exhibited in museums worldwide, and her works are held in the permanent collections of many institutions including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; The Fondation Cartier, Paris; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; and the Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles, CA. Sze’s work has been featured in The Whitney Biennial (2000), the Carnegie International (1999) and international biennials, including Berlin (1998), Guangzhou (2015), Liverpool (2008), Lyon (2009), São Paulo (2002), and Venice (1999, 2013, and 2015).

Guston, Philip, *Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures, and Conversations*, Documents of Twentieth-Century Art, Edited by Clark Coolidge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010.



Hidden in Plain Sight, 2016
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

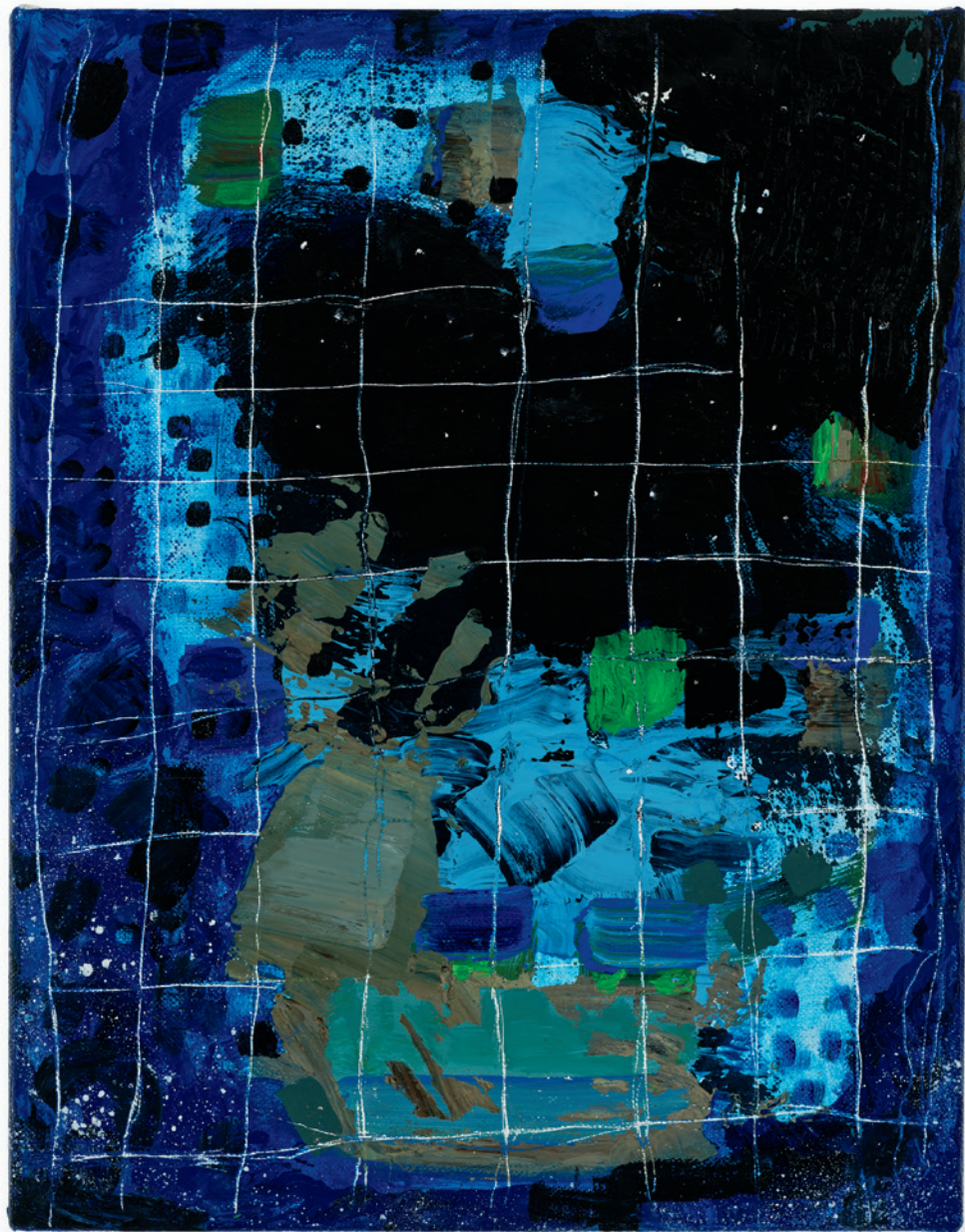
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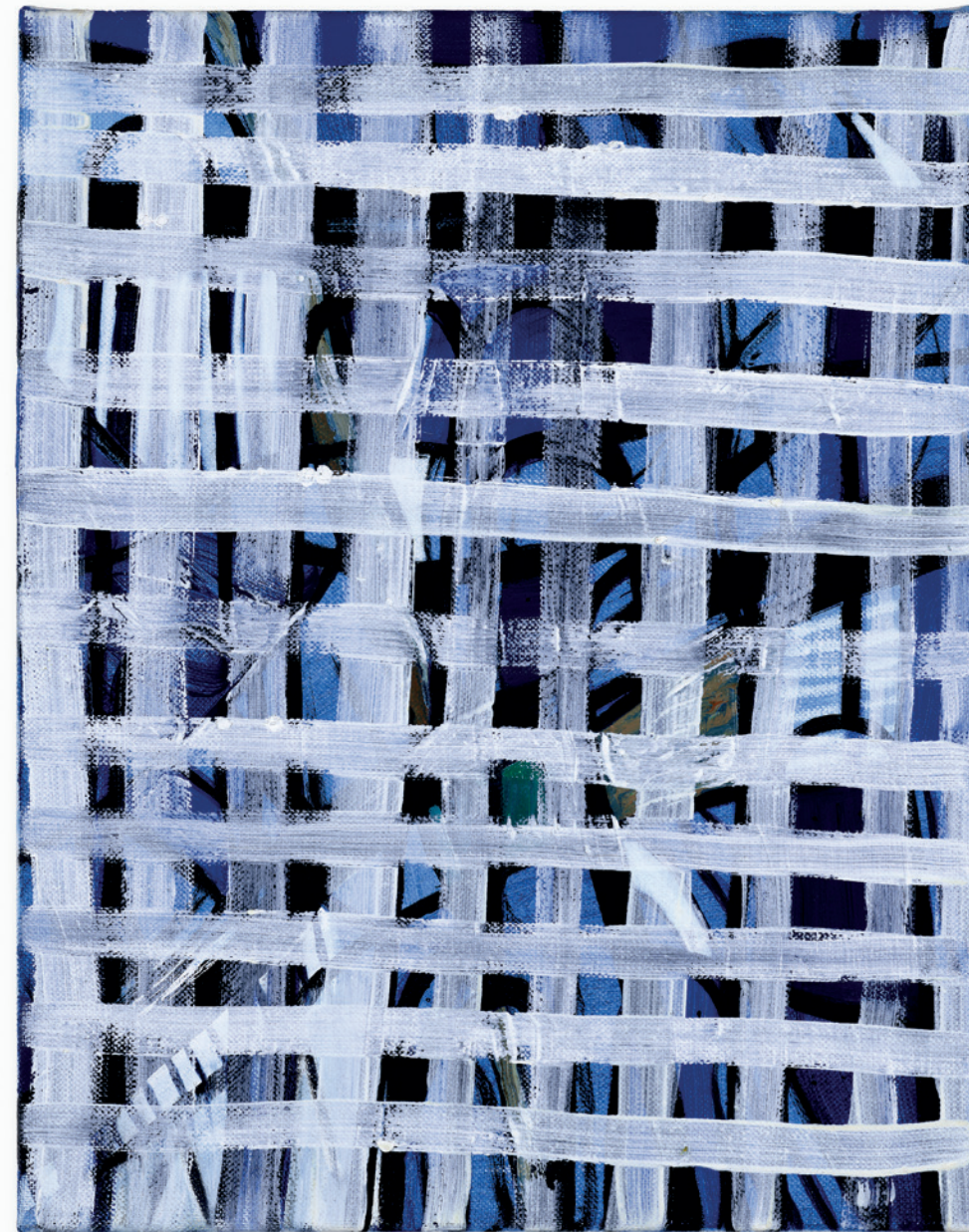
Lessons, 2017
80 x 60 inches
Oil on linen



Lessons (detail), 2017
80 x 60 inches
Oil on linen



Holding, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



Just Looking, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

CHANNELING, HEAVY AND LIGHT

SUZETTE MCAVOY

“Sometimes I’m a light artist and sometimes I’m a heavy artist. Significantly, in the making of our work, we artists channel the artists that worked before us.”

—Mary Heilmann, speaking to Ross Bleckner, *BOMB*, Spring 1999.

Throughout her work of the past two decades, artist Anne Neely cast nature in the primary role. The self, while present, was expressed through a profound concern for and connection to the natural world, in particular a devotion to environmental issues affecting water. Paintings in the series *Waterlines* (2010), *Mopang* (2011), and *Water Stories* (2014) sprang from scientific inquiry propelled by curiosity, observation, and wonder. The artist shared deeply empathetic views of nature’s rhythms, currents, needs, and beauty.

In her latest body of work, shown in the exhibition, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, Neely adopts a radically different stance. Rather than looking outward, she looks within. Fearlessly stepping into her painted world, Neely turns her keen

sense of observation on herself, mining the internal landscape of memory and emotion. Titles such as *Faith*, *Falling*, *Holding*, *Last Look*, and *Sweet Sorrow* suggest the range of her subjects. Collectively, her paintings function as icons or meditations, each a page in the artist’s book of hours.

Like painter Mary Heilmann, whose love of spirited color and cryptic iconography she shares, Neely is sometimes a light artist and sometimes a heavy artist. Wit and joy, celebration and awe inhabit her jewel-like paintings, but there is also despair and sadness, flashes of anger, and, as in *Palace* and *Demand Curve*, a deep sense of loss. We read her worry for the environment in works such as *The Scream*, *Wish*, and *Underwing*, and her fury at the current



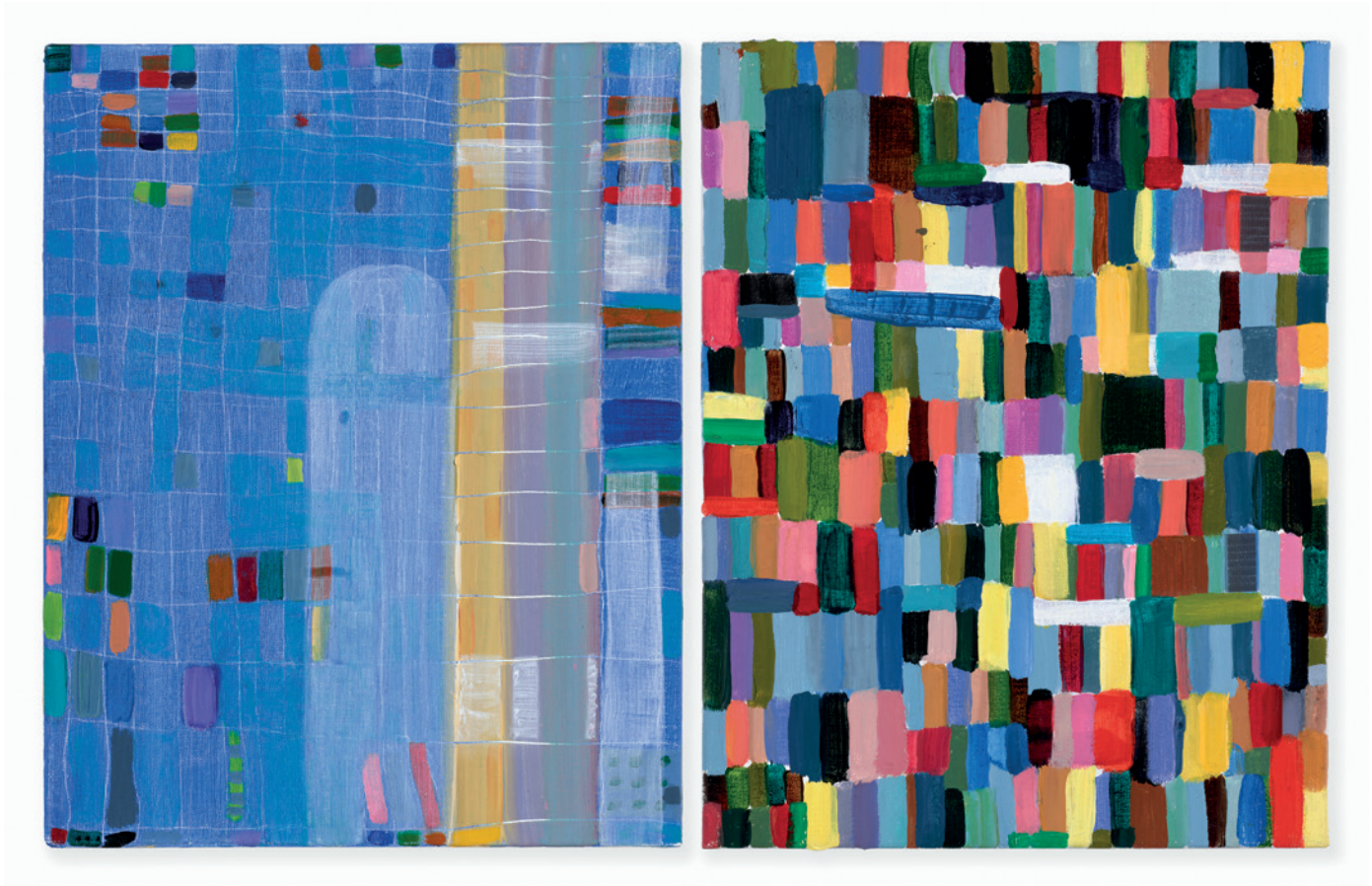
The Scream, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

President in *The Man. Fodder* and *The Flower and The Jewel* suggest the yin/yang of the female role, domestic utility and motherhood's fertile ground in nexus with the ripe plushness of sensuality's pleasures.

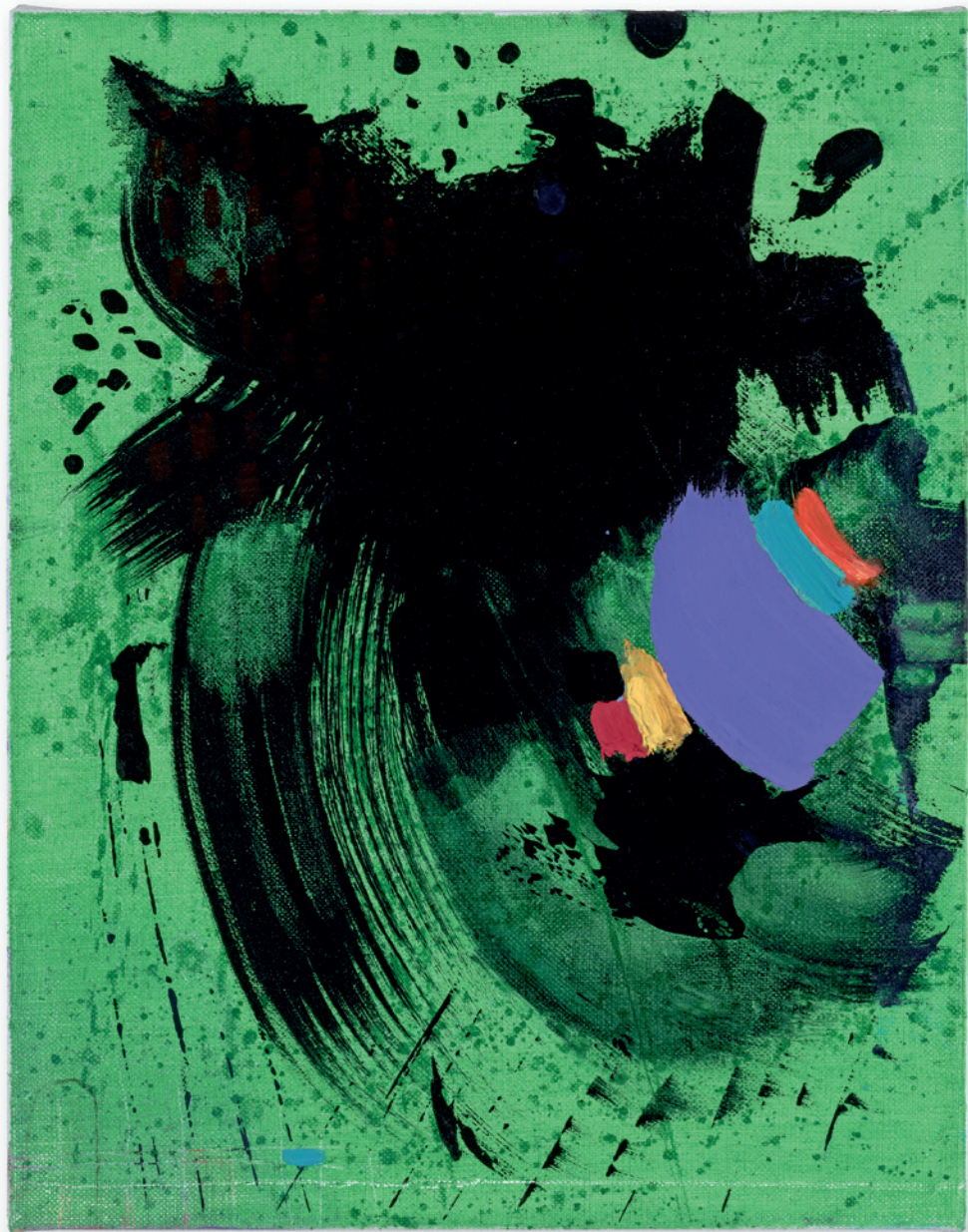
Threading through the works in the series is the leitmotif of the grid, or more precisely the net, for the horizontal and vertical lines scratched into the painted surfaces are irregular and fluid, more porous than supportive. Still, they give the artist a structure to hang her painterly hat on, to peer through, to be protected by, and to build upon, brick by colored brick. One senses Klee in the studio, whispering in the artist's ear, "To paint well means only this: to put the right colors in the right spot."

In the summer months, Neely lives on the hard coastline of Down East Maine, where cage-like lobster traps and fishing nets are piled in many dooryards. These functional grids represent tradition and sustenance, adaptation to the environment, and survival at its most elemental. Neely, in her new paintings, suggests nothing less.

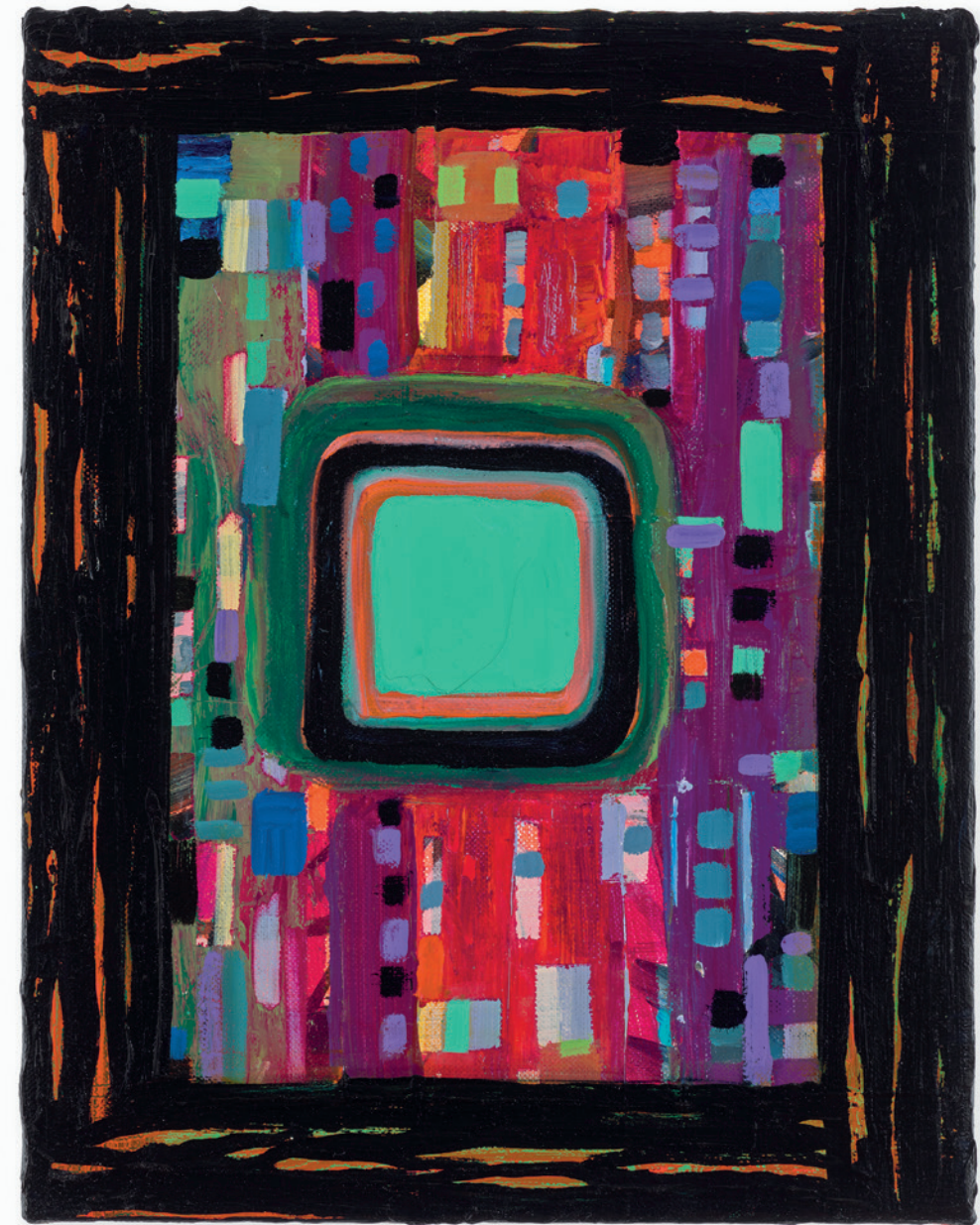
Suzette McAvoy is the Director and Chief Curator of the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockland, Maine. She has lectured and written extensively on the art and artists of Maine and has organized nationally-traveling exhibitions of the work of Louise Nevelson, Alex Katz, Kenneth Noland, Lois Dodd, Karl Schrag, and Alan Magee. She received a B.A. in Art History from William Smith College and an M.A. in Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program. She previously served as Chief Curator at the Farnsworth Art Museum and as Director of the University of Rhode Island Art Galleries. She lives in Belfast, Maine.



<i>Sweet Sorrow</i> , 2016	<i>Dynamic Stability</i> , 2017
14 x 11 inches	14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen	Oil on linen



Blackbird Fly, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



After Howard Hodgkin, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



Portrait of the Artist, 2016
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



Palace, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



Wish, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



A Simple Painting, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



Building Landscape, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

ANNE NEELY: DWELLING ON PAINTING

JOHN A. TYSON

Anne Neely's art provides ways of exploring ideas and transmitting knowledge. Her prior series have treated mortality (in *Leaving: A Meditation on Death*, 1998) and the effects of pollution on the world around us (in "Water Stories," 2014). Although meaning is present in her most recent series, "Hidden in Plain Sight," it is not totally fixed; this body of paintings does not deal quite so explicitly with worldly issues. Rather, these serial works, primarily realized on fourteen-by-eleven-inch canvases, engage with the matter of painting: Neely references her own process, rhymes painterly passages, and plumbs the history of the medium. She avoids any single style and instead channels the spirits of other painters, from Les Nabis to Philip Guston. Moreover, "Hidden in Plain Sight" transmits Neely's delight in acts of composition. She clearly relishes daubing, dissolving, spraying, squishing, pressing, scraping, spreading, scumbling, and combing the pigment

on canvas. Her vast imagination about possible techniques surely owes something to her explorations of printmaking as well as to more than forty years of experience with her primary medium. The artist has suggested that dwelling in a specific place is important in order for her to capture some of the site's essence. A new inflection informs her methodology here; now, she dwells on painting.

For much of the last three decades, Neely has created paintings that refer directly or indirectly to the landscape. Many of her works in this vein represent oscillating views, which push and pull the beholder between aerial and subterranean vistas. Despite multiple perspectives, they are without fail oriented horizontally—in the typical fashion of landscape paintings. While the new paintings are mostly vertical compositions, they bear the imprint of Neely's past production. For example, *The Scream* (2017) suggests an

Surprise (detail), 2009
45 x 60 inches
Oil on linen



overhead view with cartographic trails and diluvial traces in white on pine, which recall the poured paint flows of Neely's "Water Stories." *Building Landscape* (2017) has transfer-printed paint in the lower edge that could depict mountains or trees. However, despite her title, Neely thwarts an easy reading of a panorama by emphasizing the flatness of the support, superimposing a spray-painted ovoid and brushy navy chevron on the surface. Similarly, *A Simple Painting* (2017), with its bush (resembling an extraterrestrial life form) in the center of a decorative yellow-ochre ground, presents a vision of nature isolated from picturesqueness.

Just as traces of past practice are visible in recent work, so too can we find in older projects markers signaling the trails Neely would blaze in her current paintings. The aptly entitled *Surprise* (2009) strongly anticipates her shift to painting about painting. Its giant dragged curve

in grape-soda purple, punctuated by blue and black rhizomatic crackles, breaks through the tree-frog-green and Meyer lemon-yellow striations glimmering across her canvas. "Hidden in Plain Sight" is replete with these kinds of juxtapositions of color and texture. Canvases like the multihued *Blackbird Fly* (2017)—in which a similar purple smear is juxtaposed against a black slashing, calligraphic figure on a light green ground—and *After Howard Hodgkin* (2017) both hum and wail. In *Odalisque* and *Ghost* (both 2017) she achieves dazzling compositions by speaking in the voices of Pierre Bonnard and Gustav Klimt, respectively. Becoming a medium herself, Neely draws upon the wealth of painting knowledge she has accrued over a lifetime as a voracious consumer of art books and a seasoned traveler to museums the world over. In what is only an apparent paradox, she paints in such a fresh manner because of her wisdom.



Cypher, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

Neely began “Hidden in Plain Sight” after contemplating a grouping of wooden paint stirrers on a palette in her studio. She was drawn to the arrangement and felt compelled to render it in paint, realizing chance had gifted her a compelling composition. Canvases like *Cypher* and *Hidden in Plain Sight* (both 2017) contain groupings of stirrer-like forms that closely resemble what she had seen. The two titles provide clues about the importance of these paintings for unlocking her others. Evoking Ellsworth Kelly (who often made seemingly abstract paintings referring to concrete forms), Neely transformed the stirring sticks into planes of bold color. But her sense of humor and irreverence distinguish her painting from the drier work of the late painter from Spencertown. Instead, she also takes a page out of the book of Jasper Johns, who often mined his prior oeuvre for new production. Again and again he reprised a Savarin coffee can filled with brushes, a motif pulled from the headwaters of his artistic process.

There is also a ludic and mischievous side to Neely’s output that parallels Johns’s. For, in addition to referencing objects from her studio environment, she animates the paint stick forms by giving them beady eyes and, in some cases, gaping mouths and limbs. Indeed, yet another figure haunts her operations: the painter Philip Guston. While still working in his abstract expressionist mode, he described the space in which he painted as “the narrow passage from a diagramming to that other state—a corporeality.”¹ It is in this gap between the graphic and the bodily that Neely maneuvers, too. Her *The Scream* (2017), an amusing reprisal of Edvard Munch’s homunculus, is particularly successful in this sense. Such whimsical figures abound in Neely’s work, although they are sometimes hard to spot.

Neely hopes audiences will commence “just looking” at her painted surfaces. In a painting with this title (as well as in others), an off-kilter network of expressive interweaving brushstrokes covers the entire canvas. The white sieve structure gives the spectator the feeling she is peering through a net or basket, though precisely what vista lies below in *Just Looking’s* (2017) partially obscured black and blue under layer is unclear.² Flat frontal planes and grid

patterns emphasize materiality. Additionally, the canvases’ vertical “portrait” orientation and absence of horizon lines deny association to landscape. Neely’s rapturous marks and vivid fields of color produce visual pleasure: spectators savor regarding the paint.

Nonetheless, in some canvases, she craftily incorporates depth by superimposed layerings and multiply coded shapes. In *Memory* (2017) and *Cypher*, forms that initially read as planar faces—each with a geometric mouth, single dot eye, and hair affixed with barrettes—can equally become proscenium stages with elaborate curtains. *About Water* and *Fodder* (both 2017) are all-overs, respectively in blue and brown, with wavering woven grids, which the painter achieved by scratching down to the grain of the canvas with needle-like tacks. While optically stimulating, they are resolutely non-figurative—and do not host small beings. Both paintings recall textiles, especially plaid tablecloths or tea towels, which are typically coded feminine and domestic. The grid structures many fabric designs; it is also one of the ur-motifs of modernist abstraction (as the critic Rosalind Krauss explored in the late 1970s).³

Thus, it might be said that many of Neely’s canvases are feminist and feminine reimaginings of the grid. A matrix—a word referring to regular organizational structures, a rocky mass in which jewels and stones are embedded, and etymologically comes from the Latin word for womb—undergirds nearly all of the works in “Hidden in Plain Sight.” These possible meanings most clearly crystalize in *The Flower and the Jewel* (2017). This painting is built up of jagged touches, in a pink and peach, Guston-esque palette, which radiate from a divisionist light pink and purple core—just slightly decentered. A spattering of darker marks appears on the outer edge. The painter Georg Baselitz once remarked that Guston’s paintings were “not that abstract,” but a “distortion of the abstract, full of concrete forms.”⁴ His words ring true for Neely, who also does not trade in pure abstraction. Although *The Flower and the Jewel* might depict the titular subjects, the canvas seems to perform a celebration of (or confrontation



Fodder, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen



The Flower and the Jewel, 2017
14 x 11 inches
Oil on linen

with) female genitalia. It reworks *The Origin of the World* (Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting of the same subject) for the contemporary moment, reclaiming the subject.⁵ Equally topical are *Man* (2017), a grotesque black, purple, and blond head, and *Fence* (2017), a meandering ink weave over a bubblegum pink ovoid, which conjures up the "pussy hats" of the January 2017 women's marches.

Ultimately, aligning with Neely's wider oeuvre, "Hidden in Plain Sight" may be seen to catalyze new comprehension. She reminds us that not all important information comes in the form of weighty prose; jokes, as Sigmund Freud famously taught, can affect (and reflect) the contents of the subconscious. So too might the searching contemplation of lighter paintings impact our imaginations and understandings. Neely's artist's statement mentions that, like so many of us, she shifts through various identities. With "Hidden in Plain Sight" she travels through them

artistically, inviting spectators along. Ideas, old and new, dwell in Neely's paintings; dwelling on them brings those ideas to life.

1 Philip Guston, "Statement in Twelve Americans" (1956) in *Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures, and Conversations*, Documents of Twentieth-Century Art, ed. Clark Coolidge (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 10.

2 The painting began with a landscape, according to the artist.

3 See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (summer 1979): 50-64.

4 Georg Baselitz in conversation with Michael Auping, March 18, 1999, cited in Auping, "Impure Thoughts: On Guston's Abstraction," in *Philip Guston Retrospective*, exh. cat (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Thames & Hudson, 2003), 45.

5 Courbet's perspective is clearly detached from (and other to) the body he depicts, while Neely proposes more ambiguous ownership with the tight crop of her vaginal scene.

This essay was written as part of the **Art Critic Mentoring Program**, a partnership between AICA-USA (US section of International Association of Art Critics) and CUE, which pairs emerging writers with AICA-USA mentors to produce original essays on a specific exhibiting artist. Please visit aicausa.org for more information on AICA-USA, or cueartfoundation.org to learn how to participate in this program. Any quotes are from interviews with the author unless otherwise specified. No part of this essay may be reproduced without prior consent from the author. Lilly Wei is AICA's Coordinator for the program this season.

John A. Tyson is an assistant professor at UMass Boston. From 2015-2017 he was the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow in the Departments of Modern and American Prints and Drawings and British and American Paintings at the National Gallery of Art. There he curated *Matthias Mansen: Configurations, Parallel Practices: Artists and the Moving Image*, and *New Waves: Transatlantic Bonds between Film and Art in the 1960s*. Tyson's writing has appeared in *Art in Print*, *Word & Image*, and the *International Review of African American Art*, as well as in other journals, catalogues, and online platforms.

Mentor **Nancy Princenthal** is a New York-based critic and former Senior Editor of *Art in America*; other publications to which she has contributed include *Artforum*, *Parkett*, the *Village Voice*, and the *New York Times*. Her book *Agnes Martin: Her Life and Art* (Thames and Hudson) was published in June 2015. She is also the author of *Hannah Wilke* (Prestel, 2010), and her essays have appeared in monographs on Shirin Neshat, Doris Salcedo, Robert Mangold and Alfredo Jaar, among many others. She is a co-author of two recent books on leading women artists, including *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium* (Prestel, 2013). Having taught at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; Princeton University; Yale University, RISD, Montclair State University and elsewhere, she is currently on the faculty of the School of Visual Arts.

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