

ANNE NEELY

MOPANG

RECENT PAINTINGS

September 7 - October 8, 2011

LOHIN • GEDULD • GALLERY

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HAPPENING

by Jonathan Franzen

For me the world of painting divides into a pair of simple categories: work that is happening and work that isn't. A couple of years ago, the Lohin Geduld Gallery sent me a card for a show by Anne Neely, whom I hadn't heard of before. On the card was an image of Neely's large painting "Surprise."



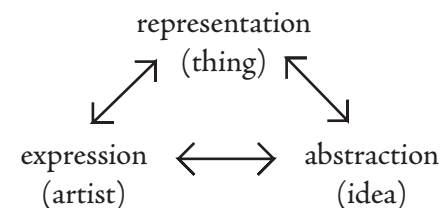
Surprise, 2009, oil on linen, 45" x 60"

It was a landscape I recognized precisely *because* it was unrecognizable, precisely *because* it was deformed in the way that all landscapes are deformed now, by our awareness of ecological change and peril. The image somehow seamlessly connected what we can see of a waterscape

with what we can't see beneath it, thereby evoking the modern tension between what we emotionally experience of nature and what we rationally now know about it. But this was just a miniature image on

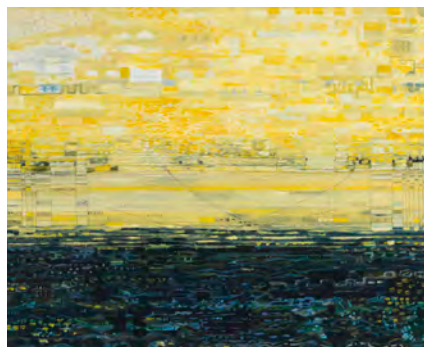
a card; you have to be in a painting's presence before you can know if it's really happening. When I went downtown to see the show, I found it full of happening work—intensely rhythmic, audacious in palette, deeply felt and deeply thought out. I'd never bought a stranger's paintings before, but I bought two of Neely's on the spot.

I've now had two years to try to figure out why, besides for their sheer visual splendor, I like them so much. Neely's work seems to me paradigmatically modernist, if we understand modernism to have introduced to painting both the idea of abstraction and the exciting awareness and expressive exploitation of paint as paint. Modernism at its best sets up a dynamic triad:



By rendering landscapes in the form of rhythms—the spacing and alternation of similar but discreet visual elements—and by granting these elements considerable autonomy as pure paint, Neely achieves that most sought-after and elusive of qualities: depth. Presented with all three points on the triad, the eye doesn't settle; the painting keeps happening. And Neely's visual rhythms reinforce this flickering dynamic, this never-just-one thing effect, in ways that recall the alternation of electric and magnetic fields in the propagation of light, or the indeterminacy of wave and particle at the subatomic level.

Hence, I suspect, the title of the larger of the Neely works that I've been living with, "Somewhere in Between." At the representational level, "Somewhere in Between" is one-third blue ocean and two-thirds yellow late-afternoon sky, abstracted into micro-units of color which,

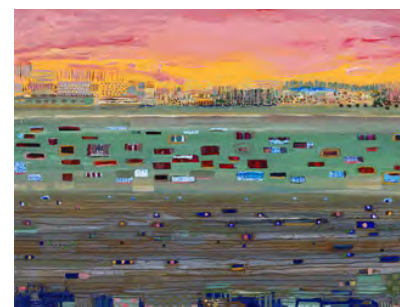


Somewhere in Between, 2008, oil on linen, 36" x 44"

in keeping with the title, do not segregate neatly into ocean and sky. There are quanta of light on the water, yes, but there are also quanta of water in the sky. This sky is rendered, by stacks of irregular but neatly ruled rectangles at its "base," as something more architectonic than skylike; and yet it's also still patently sky. The painting's (literal) masterstrokes are a pair of fine, dark, slightly curved diagonal lines whose surficiality is true not to nature but to the art-object that Neely has made out of her experience of nature. To follow these lines, as the eye unstoppably wants to,

is to move from object to subject to object to subject; to be somewhere in between within and without.

In the other Neely painting I live with, the more jocularly titled "Special Delivery," we see from a considerable height and distance what appears to be a semi-industrial waterfront. Above it is a luridly pink and orange sky; below it is, perhaps, a dirty harbor, punctuated with parallel rows of container-like rectangles. The upper half of the painting is readily readable as abstracted landscape, but the rectangles below are in open flight from direct representation. In their nearly uniform size and spacing, they want to become freeway traffic—containers piggybacked on trucks, special deliveries. The landscape above pulls in one direction, the ambiguity below pulls in the opposite direction. This alone would be enough to make the painting happen. But if you look at the little containers more carefully, you find a whole extra world of painterly invention; they're playfully varied color-candies; they seem most involved in simply being themselves. And in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas—where Neely has gone fully overboard with her penchant for rectangles and painted a tiny checkerboard pattern, emphatically "flattening" one or two square inches of the image—her playfulness becomes outright comic. (You might be reminded of the four bizarre smoke rings, suspended in representational sky, in Neely's earlier work "Going West.") The checkerboard simultaneously raises the question of its presence in the



Special Delivery, 2008, oil on linen, 24" x 32"

painting and suggests the artist's answer to the question: "Because this painting was happening!"

The tensions that make Neely's work happen are realized more subtly and majestically in her new show, "Mopang." Having lived for a number of years in New England, I began with a purely subjective



Going West, 2004, oil on panel, 11" x 14"

response to the new paintings. The North Atlantic's eternally cold coastal waters, which are somehow more affecting, not less, for their austerity and frequent trashiness; the mournful atmospherics of New England's by no means pristine bogs in autumn; the sadness of a ridge of bare second-growth Massachusetts

hardwoods in winter; the dazzling but

less than wholly believable promise of spring in a landscape of altered ecologies and polluted ground water: these paintings are full of the region's difficult beauty. And although the visual rhythms are mostly more subdued (more somberly geological, less architectonic) than in Neely's previous New York show, her painterly moves are even more considered and confident and, seemingly, confessional.

In the abstracted, ice-filled seascape of "Island" there are only two expressive anomalies—a deliberately unhidden rectangular "patching," and another of Neely's signature corner matrixes of squares—but the two of them, in their very discreteness, are quietly defiant in declaring the emotional presence of the artist's island self. In the paintings where Neely's color-candies appear, the candies still carry the suggestion

of consumer-industrial disturbance, but they've become less self-foregrounding, more integrated into the larger and slower natural forces that the work evokes, and thus seem to chart the artist's progress from anger toward sadness or acceptance.

What's foregrounded now is the big picture—several of the new paintings are literally very large—and here Neely is admirably building on the perspectival disorientations that I first found so breathtaking in "Surprise." By constructing her paintings largely out of broad horizontal strata (sometimes dead level, sometimes gently curving like folded rock), and by letting the paint have its way within these strata, she is able to lead the eye from light-of-day landscapes to impossible cross-sectional views of buried rock and water without sacrificing continuity or intelligibility. She posits a natural oneness of the visible and the buried, and then, in her painting, she achieves it. Which is, again, the essence of modernistic happening: all three points of the triad (representation, ideation, and paint-as-paint) are not just equally present in the work but equally *necessary* to it. What makes Neely's new work especially fine is that she manages her artistic syntheses within the context of straightforwardly affecting New England landscape painting—the glittering frozen beauty of "Kettle Hole," the vibrating lushness of "Pond Park," the sere grandeur of "Mopang." These paintings, in their daring and maturity, are like a person whose mind excites you and whom you also instinctively can't help loving, a *happening* person. Long live modernism, long live New England, and long live Anne Neely.

June 2011

Mopang

2010

oil on linen

60 x 80 inches



Cahoosic

2011

oil on linen

60 x 80 inches

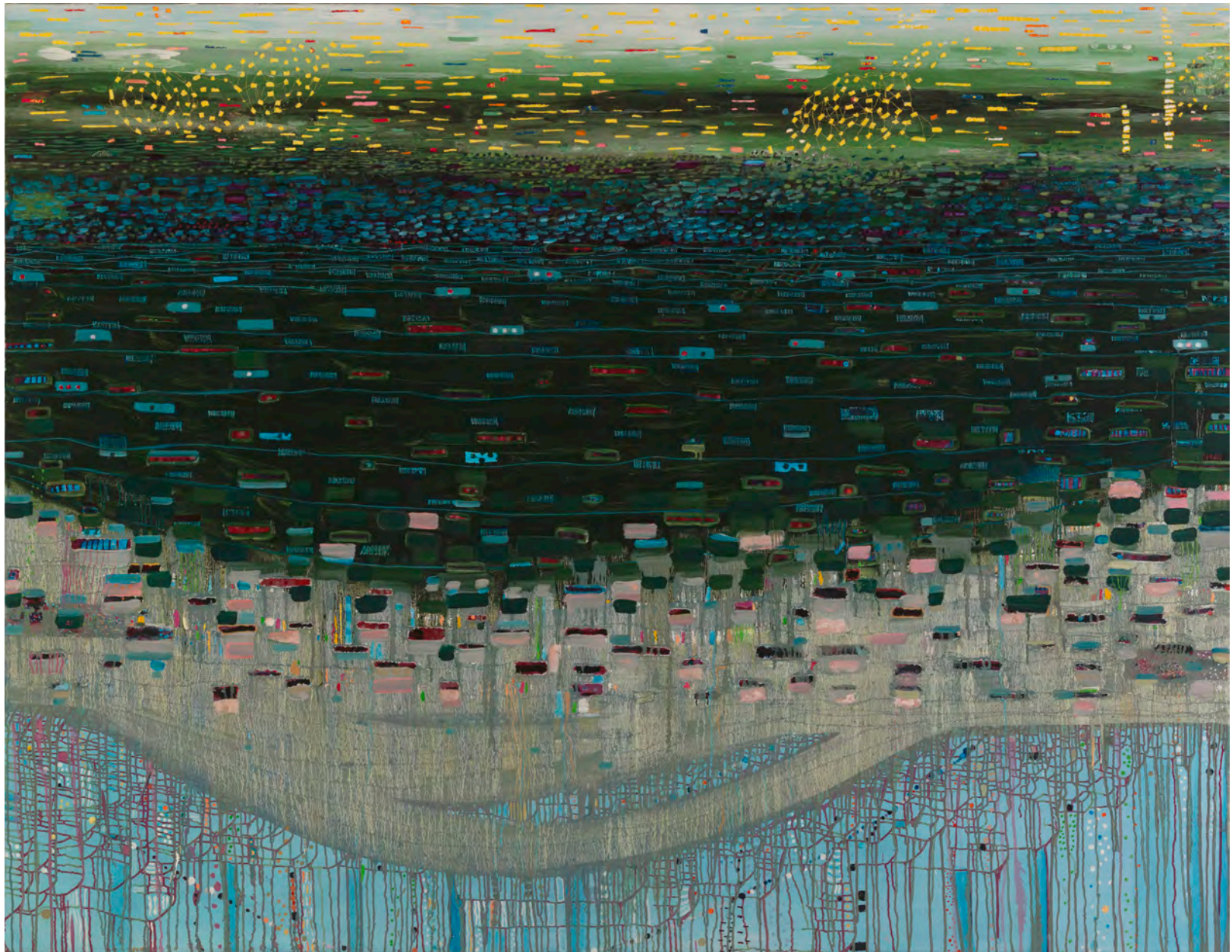


Turlach, Turlough

2010-11

oil on linen

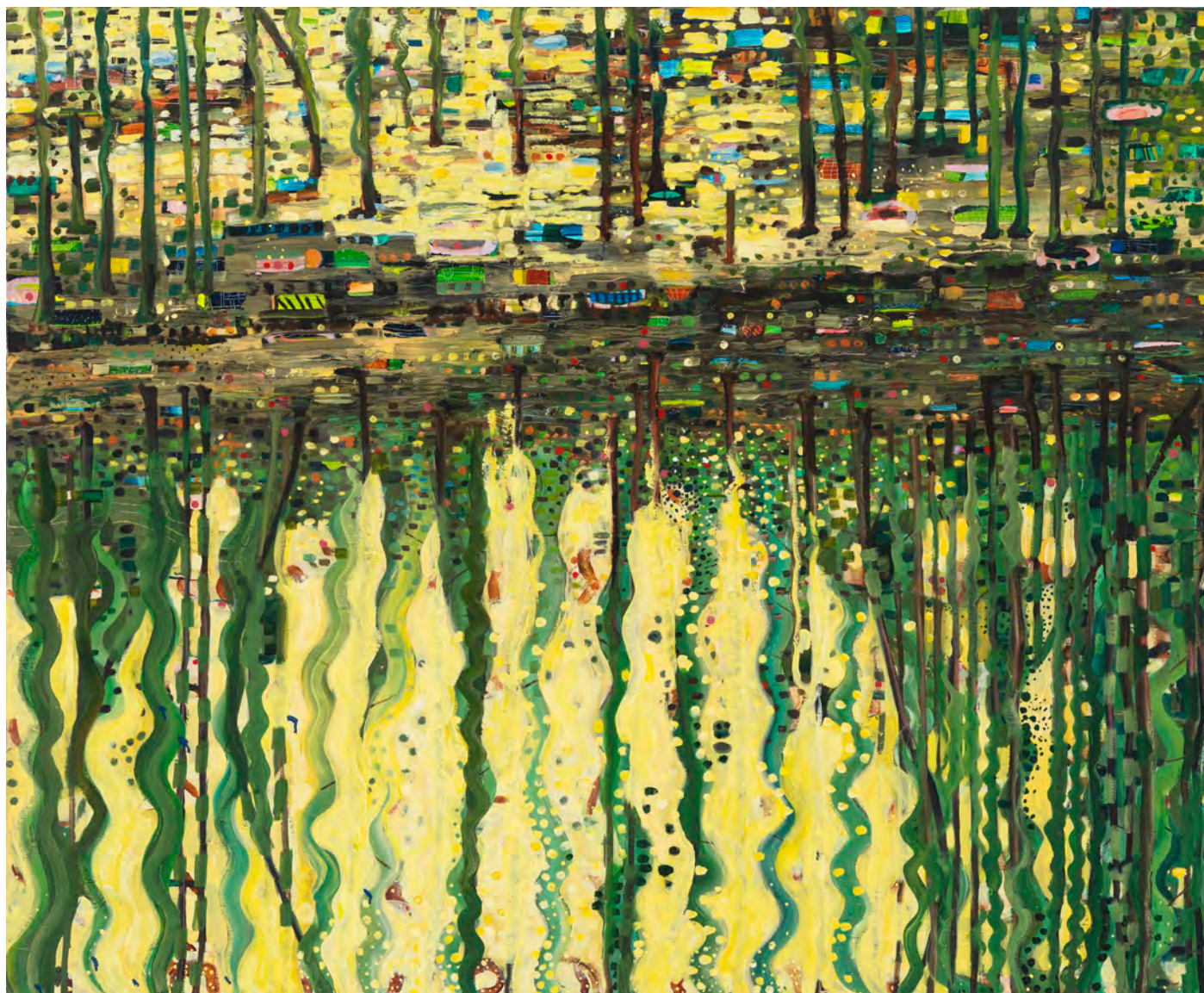
56 x 72 inches



Kettle Hole
2010-11
oil on linen
36 x 44 inches



Pond Park
2009-11
oil on linen
36 x 44 inches



Tidal

2010

oil on linen

24 x 32 inches

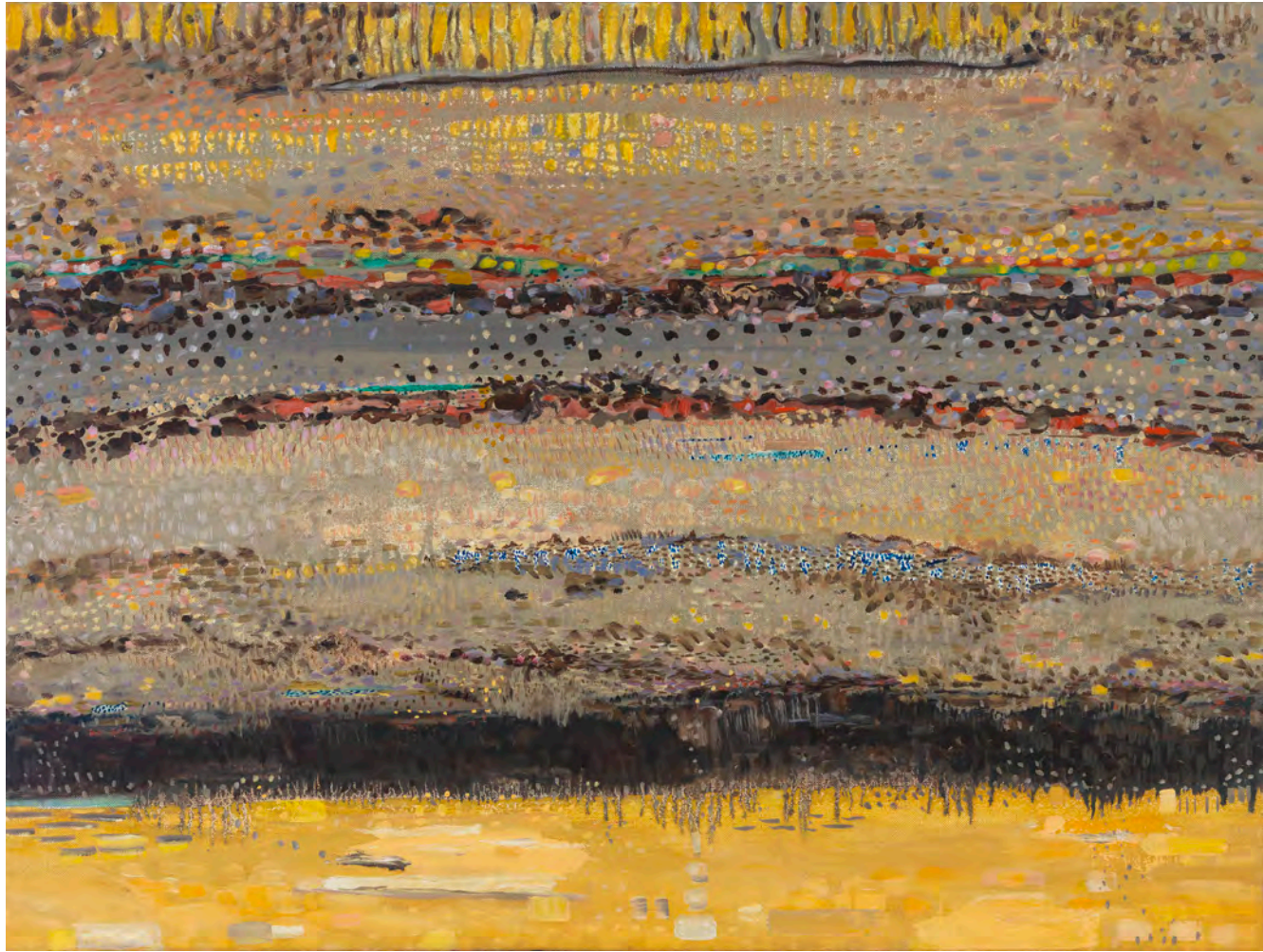


Riverside

2011

oil on linen

24 x 32 inches



Bedrock

2010

oil on linen

16 x 20 inches



Levee

2011

oil on linen

16 x 20 inches



Aglow

2011

oil on linen

16 x 20 inches





Off Shore, 2010, oil on linen, 11 x 14 inches



Plain, 2011, oil on linen, 11 x 14 inches



Mopang (detail)

A few years ago, a journalist friend gave me Marq de Villiers' *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource*, a sobering account of the world water crisis. The narrative appealed to my environmental conscience and, in the studio, opened my imagination to the wonder and mystery of water. Consequently, I made paintings of surface water and of water that exists in aquifers and groundwater, under the earth's skin.

Throughout the year I work in my studio in Boston, and each summer I exchange my life in the city for the silence in remote Washington County, Maine. My Boston studio echoes the noises of a commercial city. In Maine, urban madness slips away and I respond with heightened awareness to the world around me: to weather and to water. Tragically, humankind has compromised the once healthy waterways worldwide. Occasionally there are success stories, such as the Mopang Aquifer in Township 30, Maine. In 1989, passionately concerned citizens formed the "Clean Water Coalition" and rescued Mopang from a toxic ash dump being placed next to it. Now this aquifer flows under rock, shale and soil safeguarded, feeding streams and the Machias River. It bears a name given by its early guardians, the Maliseet-Passamaquoddy Indians.

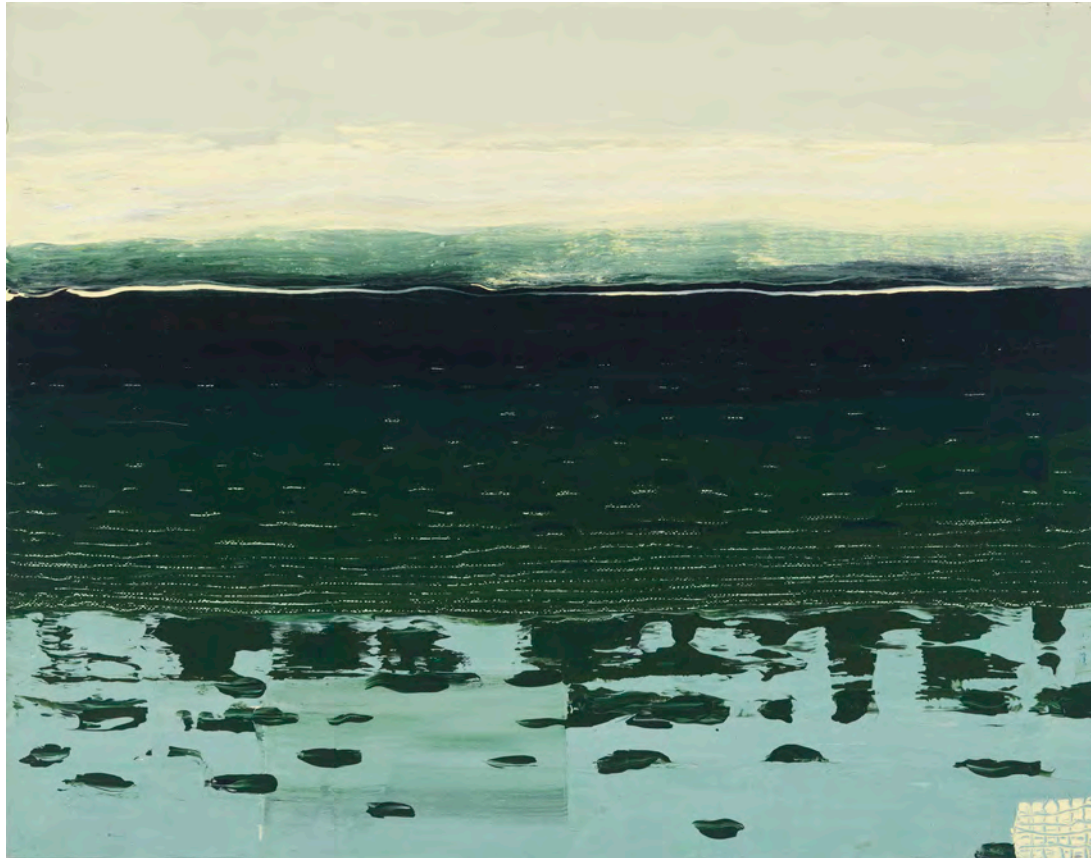
I continue to be moved by the challenges we face today to preserve the health and the abundance of water. My own challenge is in my studio where, in some small way, I attempt to convey the beauty of this essential resource and the risk of ignoring it.

Anne Neely
June 2011

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A special note of gratitude to Barbara Divver.



Island, 2007-08, oil on linen, 11 x 14 inches

Anne Neely's work has been the subject of over twenty solo gallery and museum exhibitions in Boston, New England, New York, San Francisco, and Ireland. Neely has participated in numerous group shows both here and abroad. Her work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *The Irish Times*, *The New York Times*, *Art New England*, and *The Boston Globe*, and has been selected for *New American Paintings* and *100 Boston Painters*, among other publications. In 2009 she was a finalist for the Massachusetts Cultural Council in painting. Neely is represented in private and museum collections including the Whitney Museum, the National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian Institution, the Brooklyn Museum, the DeCordova Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She lives in Jonesport, Maine and Milton, Massachusetts, where she teaches at Milton Academy and holds the Lamont Teaching Chair in the Humanities. *Mopang* is Anne Neely's fourth solo exhibition at Lohin Geduld Gallery.

This catalogue has been published on the occasion of the exhibition

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