



Johanna St. Clair

The Thicket

February 10 - March 25, 2023
Opening Reception : **February 10, 6 - 9pm**

In this, Johanna St. Clair's second solo exhibition with the gallery, she'll be presenting a mix of new oil paintings and works on paper. St. Clair frequently paints outdoors in natural settings that inspire her content. "I have found that they are only successful when I sit directly in front of the subject (as it is shifting in the wind and light), and also know the subject internally from many sessions of drawing it."

Whether working with the black Sumi ink or the range of colorful oil paints, the color is not tethered to what the artist sees. It is the artist's internal logic rather than a literal transcription that is being recorded. Both mediums are fluid and chaotic, but the ink is unalterable, while oil paint builds up, allowing for a deeper, more inward exploration into the idea of the world.

"First I fall in love with something in my environment – a tree, a flower. My current obsession is the waterfall and swimming hole on Mt. Tamalpais known as Inkwells. I lose my heart to a subject when it has a compelling chaotic structure: it's a puzzle. Then I try to capture that weird chaos using any number of fluid mediums (ink, watercolor, oil paint) and direct observation. I don't pre-sketch, I just start making marks and use deep concentration to keep track of where I am as I work (solving the puzzle). Through repeatedly painting or drawing the same subject, I develop a sense of its internal logic, leading to natural and intuitive deconstruction.

Paintings, drawings, and other forms of art are analogies. The analogy is 'the paint on this canvas is like a leaf.' Many of the marks are not very convincing as parts of plants and slip back into being just paint, telling a story of how the paint was applied and how it interacted with the paint already there. So the analogy also works the other way: 'this leaf is like a blob of paint.' Layered within the analogous structure of the paintings lie lots of other analogies, lots of marks that are like something.

Recently I have been thinking a lot about humor as I work. Painting is funny (ask any painter) because the process has chaos, and therefore surprises, embedded in it. A mark that starts with one intention often changes into something unintended. There is humor in the repurposing of an idea, in the rerouting of thought that takes place when a mark has multiple meanings. Not all my marks are funny, but they are all embedded with play. Through marks on paper and canvas we play at seeing, perceiving, thinking."

Johanna St. Clair lives and works in San Francisco. Along with her husband, John McCambridge, she co-founded Mollusk Surf Shop which has developed into a cultural institution that integrates surfing, art, craft, music, and film. Mollusk has brick and mortar stores in San Francisco's Outer Sunset Neighborhood and Venice Beach, and a clothing line which is widely distributed. A few years after starting the business, Johanna returned to making art. First with drawings from observation on small, blank cards (she keeps a pocket-studio with her at all times), then with her larger-scale ink and brush paintings on paper, and recently with paintings in oil, Johanna's work has grown more direct, fluid, and urgent. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Tokyo, and at the Tucson Desert Art Museum.