

Hand to Ground

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Abstract

(Constance) Stanzie Tooth's thesis exhibition titled, *Hand to Ground*, explores ideas of origin; both the mythology of a personal origin as well as the origins of painting and representation. Interrogating the history of landscape painting, the exhibition skews notions of identity by reconsidering representations of the landscape. Inspired by Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing*, and paired with reminiscences of her childhood in rural Ontario, Tooth's paintings unfold oblique narratives of a communion with land. These questions of personal ecology are filtered through an intense material expression, reinforcing the idea of coming into being.

The exhibition was on view at the Karsh Masson Gallery in Ottawa from August 1st to September 10th, 2015.

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Installation Photographs



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Image 2: installation view of Hand to Ground at Karsh Masson Gallery, front of gallery. List of works from left to right: *Merge (Light Seeker)*, *Untitled (Fog)*, *High Stepping*, *Two Headed Poem*.

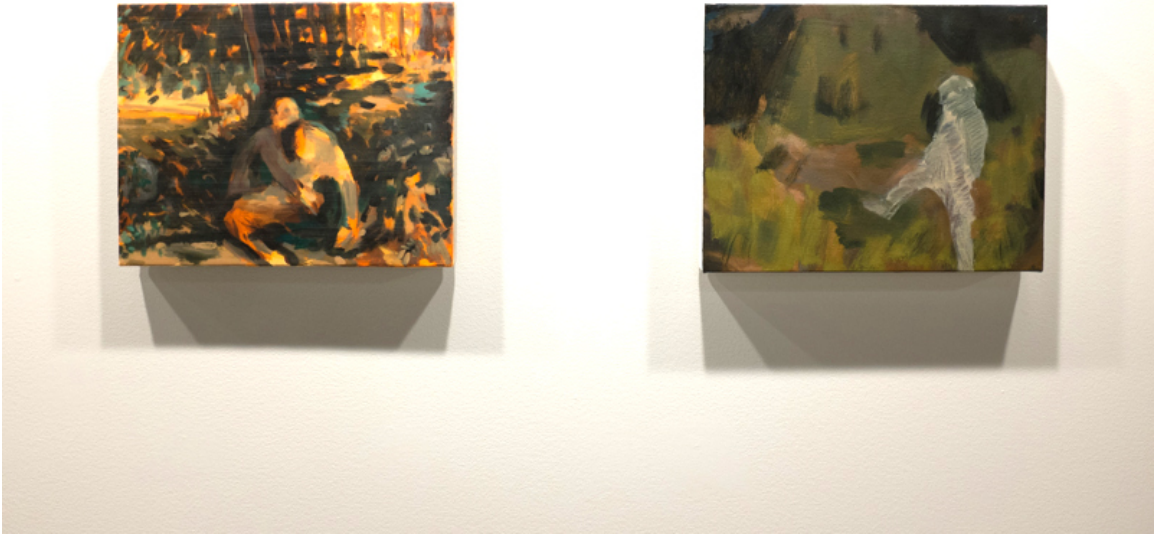


Image 3: installation view of works (left to right): *Untitled (Fog)*, *High Stepping*.



Image 4: panoramic installation view of *Hand to Ground* at Karsh Masson Gallery, view from back of gallery. List of works from left to right: *Fifth Sister*, *The Underbrush (Eyes)*, *Ben*, *Invisible Happenings*, *Untitled*.



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Image 8: installation view of *Invisible Happenings*. Painting mounted on wall mural painted on site at Karsh Masson Gallery.

Individual Works Photographs



Image 9: *Two Headed Poem*, 2015, oil on canvas, 223.52 x 355.6 cm



Image 10: *Untitled (Portrait)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 35.56 x 40.64 cm



Image 11: *Merge (Light Seeker)*, 2015, oil on canvas 35.56 x 40.64 cm



Image 12: *Trace (Winter)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 20.32 x 25.4 cm



Image 13: *Untitled (Fog)*, oil and cold wax on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56 cm



Image 14: *High Stepping*, 2015, oil on canvas over panel, 27.94 x 35.56cm



Image 15: *Change of Seasons (The Puddle)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 45.72 x 60.96 cm

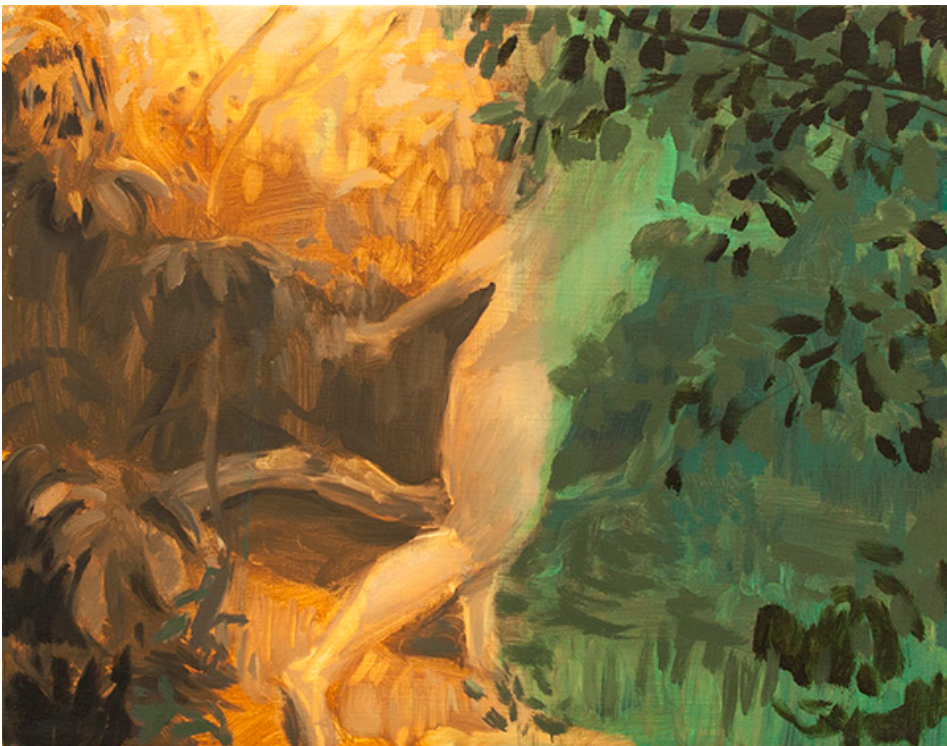


Image 16: *Woman Vanishing*, 2015, oil on linen, 27.94 x 35.56cm



Image 17: *Invisible Happenings*, 2015, oil and spray paint on canvas, 134.62 x 142.24 cm



Image 18: *Time For New Faces*, 2015, oil and spray paint on canvas, 20.32 x 25.4 cm

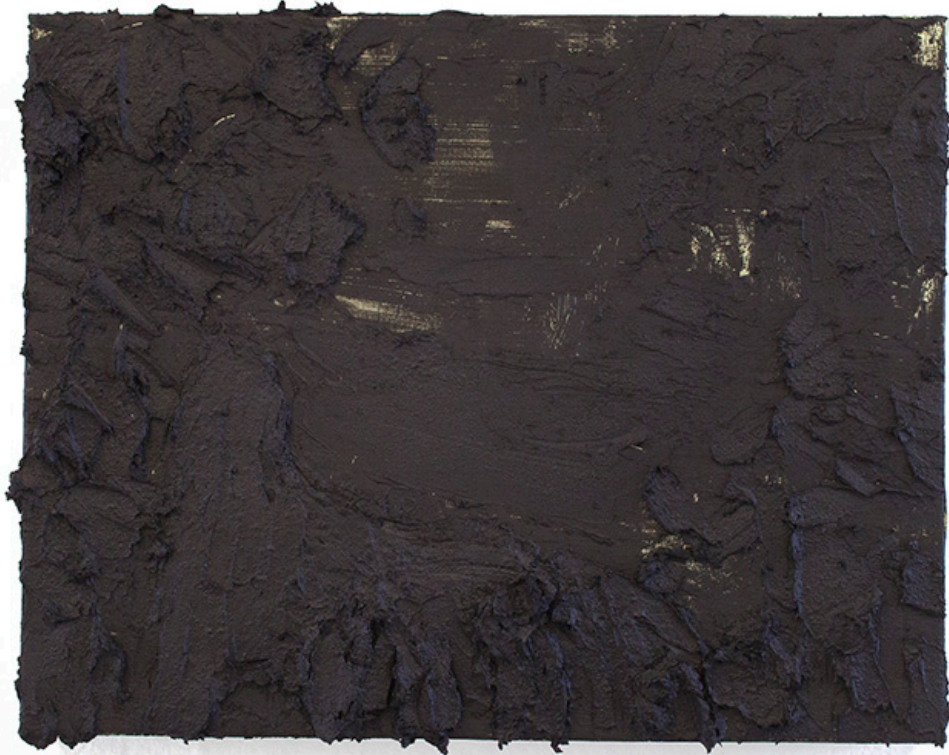


Image 19: *Fifth Sister*, 2015, powdered pigment and cold wax on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56cm



Image 20: *The Underbrush (Eyes)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56cm



Image 21: *Ben*, 2015, oil on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56cm



Image 22: *Untitled*, 2015, oil, powdered pigment and cold wax on canvas, 175.26 x 175.26 cm



Image 23: *Stoppage*, 2015, oil on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56cm

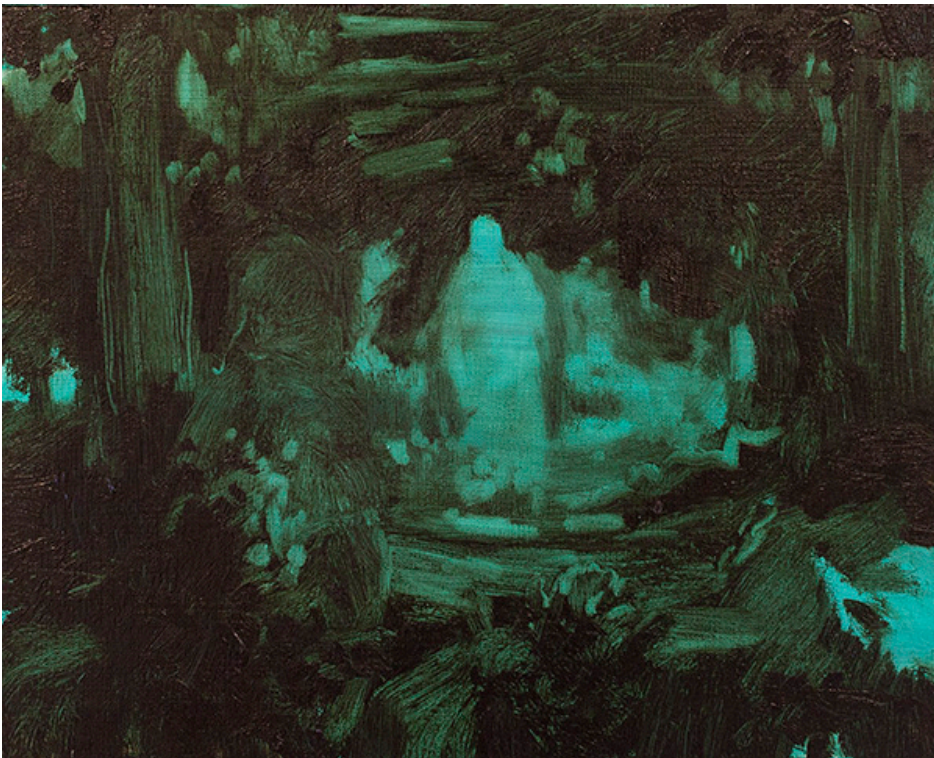


Image 24: *Familiar Ghosts*, 2015, oil on canvas, 27.94 x 35.56cm

Full Image List

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Hand to Ground

Artist Statement

I believe we all have a home landscape, a place from our childhood, whose light, space and scale are the benchmark for all other landscapes. We all carry our home landscape around inside of us.
– *John Hartman, Big North*

For me, my home landscape is a small, dense forest in rural Ontario, just outside of the village of Bath. This quote by Hartman struck a chord with me. I belong to that small patch of land. When I approach the world, it is from a position of being of that place. When I see trees they are measured against *my* trees - the ones I escaped to, played in and worked, with my four sisters. I approach the art historical landscape in a similar manner. This site, the landscape, recurs and is changed throughout histories and cultures. Considering works I admire from the history of painting, I can't help but consider: What was their benchmark? Did the artist own the land - or did the land own them - or was it taken from them? Did they belong to that place?

When I entered the MFA I thought I would abolish the landscape from my practice. I had entertained the subject before but felt I had never satisfied it. I knew I loved to paint, and for the first semesters of the program I worked to break my script, try new things and stretch my knowledge and ability of painting. My strength as a painter is my ability to react. Somewhere in the process I abandoned preparatory work and committed myself to the development of paintings on the canvas. What followed was a conversation between myself and the work, moments of spontaneous creation followed by contemplation until the act of looking at the work revealed the next step toward completing the piece. This call and response with the painting became integral to the work. I came to realize that the action of painting contained its own subject, its own material consciousness. The painting's assertion of itself as complete was akin to a new identity being expressed. Paintings would become the sum of their parts, maintaining the energy of their making.

After a trip home to Bath last summer I returned to painting landscapes. I wanted to find a way to combine my newfound agency in painting with this site of personal and cultural significance. Looking at the history of landscape painting, I felt a disconnection with the sentiments of those spaces and my own. I did not want to image my past, but to capture the feeling of my landscape and the intimacy of belonging to a place. I hoped to combine that sense of connection with land to the idea of the being of the painting.

Somewhere in this development the figure snuck in. At first it was a type of staffage, placed there as an identifier of scale of the space, a measure for the viewer to consider themselves against. Gradually, the figure became more prominent until the paintings were consumed with this conversation between body and land. With time I realized that I was trying to describe through the action of the painting ideas of communion with place. Similar to the idea of the painting revealing itself through the process of its making, the “figures” in these paintings were emergent, coming to form, figuring themselves out. This idea of the emergence of the figure and land became the driving force for my thesis exhibition.

For my thesis exhibition I am exploring the idea of morphogenesis, the process of coming to form as the subject of paintings. I have been experimenting with various stoppages in the rendering process, halting the rendering of the figure and/or the landscape to show frozen moments of transition. While I consider all of the paintings to be “complete”, the variances in the morphology of the paintings create a tension, not only between the figure and land, but also from one painting to the next. This show is an attempt to reconcile my connection to my land from many angles; my connection to home as the site where I grew and developed, my considerations of the history of painting and looking at these images of endurance that I measure myself against, and finally, considering my current position, looking at the land from a place of remove and considering it now as more of a signifier, a feeling, as opposed to a present and lived experience. This communion with body and land is not just about peacefulness, but rather negotiating personhood within a place. The figure’s assertion to form is just that, an assertion, and as such these various relationships in the paintings contain for me anxieties as well as joys.

Hart, Matthew, and John Hartman. *Big North : The Paintings of John Hartman*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1999. Print.