

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

DECEMBER 1, 2023 BY ETTY YANIV

Elizabeth Gilfilen: Denouement at Yi Gallery

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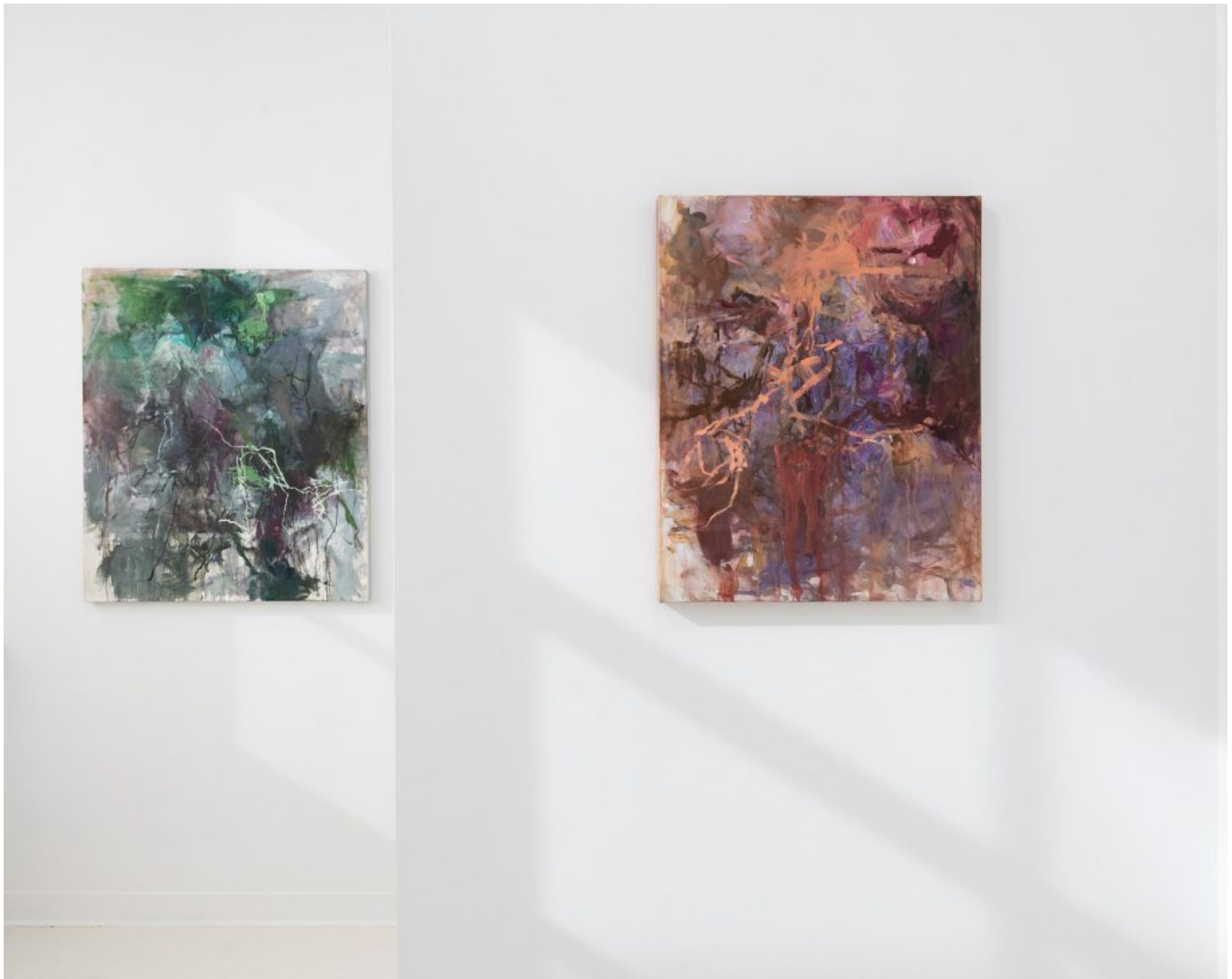


Uneath, 2023, oil on canvas, 64 x 72 inches

Elizabeth Gilfilen's debut solo show at YI Gallery presents oil paintings that exhibit a meticulous yet bold exploration of color and texture. Her strokes span from boldly assertive to gently nuanced, each adding to her work's visual depth and dynamic feel. Eschewing neat conclusions, her paintings are presented as evolving works, with each layer suggesting new narratives in an unfolding journey. The synergy of color and form in her paintings creates a dynamic tableau, inviting viewers to interact with the canvas, drawing them into the active narrative of the art's continuous unfolding.

Tell us a bit about the body of work for this show.

The mid-size works in the show were completed this past summer, while the larger paintings are very recent; they were still wet when we installed them! Seven paintings are shown in the gallery, and another five are in the office. The gallery is roughly two rooms, with a long hallway in between, so each space has a distinct feel. We installed the work with consideration to the title of the show, *Denouement*, which translates to "untie the knot." This term describes a story's unraveling of plot lines. I've always been interested in the arc of a painting. As I make the work, I am aware of the shape of the activity and how it rises and falls across the canvas and within the work. The narrative that unfolds is the story of a painting and how its actions move across the surface but, more importantly, throughout its layers. Each choice I make to go deep into the canvas, scrape off, cover-up, or reach behind and grab a line to reactivate it creates a complex history. Lately, I've been allowing that sequence to happen more deliberately. Every line or action has a purpose, and I am trying to inhabit the mark with less agitation and hopefully more clarity.



Installation view of *Flock*, 40 x 34 inches and *Trepass #1*, 30 x 24 inches, oil on canvas, 2023

I work with oil paint on canvas. For a long time, the marks I make have been very tied to the brush, and I've always felt it was important to show the evidence of my touch despite the large scale of the canvases. To get even closer to the work, I've begun using a rag to draw and rub the paint into the canvas. The surface has become more massaged; it's a little bit like oiling or waxing wood. The stain is important, and I can bury the marks a bit. I'm also using oil sticks; I'm just interested in letting any tool or method into the work that serves it. I like the drag of the oil stick and how its grittiness sits on top, in contrast to other washy distant marks. I'm interested in this kind of submerging and subsequent revealing of the traces, whether fluid brush marks, fingerprints, smears, or drawn lines.



Shoulder Grasses, 2023, oil on linen, 58 x 64 inches

Let's look at one painting in the exhibition.

This painting, *Crevice*, is the newest. It is 60 x 54, so it's large enough to feel like I am in it, but it still feels like a close space. I love to resurrect paintings, and this painting is a rework of an older work. This generative process feels good, even though I sometimes regret painting over something.



Crevice, 2018-2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 54 inches

The visual sources for me are impressions of places I've been. This one references the gnarly walls of rock encountered while hiking. The surface is very worked on this one, with lots of residue of marks underneath, textured oil stick, and washes of color underneath. I like getting lost in these moves, and time feels suspended. I like how compressed the energies start to feel, and as I work, the painting space starts to lift away from the tangible.



Detail of Crevice, 2018-2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 54 inches

All photos courtesy of Adam Reich

Denouement: Elizabeth Gilfilen at YI Gallery, 254 36th Street, Suite B634, Brooklyn, NY 11232. Exhibition is on view November 17, 2023 – January 6, 2024. An Online Viewing Room *Mica Muse* will run concurrently and premier a suite of drawings on micaceous iron oxide grounds.

For additional information, please contact Cecilia Zhang Jalboukh at cecilia@gallery-yi.com or call / text +1 (917) 617-6561.

About the artist: Elizabeth Gilfilen received her MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and has since been awarded residencies at The Golden Foundation, Yaddo, The Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Studio Immersion Project, The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, and Gallery Aferro. She has been honored with nominations from The Joan Mitchell Foundation and The Dedalus Foundation. Solo exhibitions include Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA, and The Hunterdon Museum of Art, Clinton, NJ. Reviews of her work have been featured in Art Spiel, Two Coats of Paint, The New Criterion, The Boston Globe, The Newark Star-Ledger, and The New York Times. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

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