

Dani Tull: Take a Single Letter from the Stream

By Shana Nys Dambrot, July 27, 2021

Dani Tull achieves a flickering balance between forces of untamed organic energy and the deliberation of storytelling in abstract paintings which were not only made in 2020 and 2021, but somehow embody the emotional contours of the year. Intensely meditative but with a spectacular and eccentric palette, above all the works are radiantly, unapologetically beautiful.

The earlier (2020) works display variations on solidly painted backgrounds, illuminated by gradients, laid in like cradling foundations for the sinuous striated forms which hover above them. In the more recent (2021) works, those grounds have shifted, pulled apart and come alive. Pours, spills, splatters, fractal smatterings, variable pigment densities, raw canvas or linen, delicate layers and above all, released energy all combine to generate expressivity that is both unguided and balanced.

Every painting sets off a singular form, entirely abstract but with the central, directed presence of portraiture. Where the penumbraic hombraes have the mood of shadows and a sensual hush, the expressionist variations provoke rather than soothe the eye and hint at pictorial space behind or beneath the object-protagonist-body. The forms relate to each setting in consistent but individually responsive ways. Curvaceous constructions of innumerable snaking lines of pure color are arranged in spectral schemes that alternate between resonant and dissonant relationships to their environments. The works executed against color fields carve through the ground like rivers digging canyons; those works within their wild gardens seem to grow and emerge from within those protean cosmos and congeal into separate threads.

The forms have all the cues of the body, art historical clues of curve and limb, haunch and tress — feminine without being gendered. Standing in their presence the eye follows and articulates each patiently traced stripe, considers their lavender, sky blue, marine green, indigo, rose, ivory, blood orange, fuchsia and chartreuse in relation, each to each, and again orients them within the whole. A sense of embedded meaning, internal story logic like a dream, emanates from each one with a distinct emotion and psyche. Discovering the artist's inspirations lie in correspondence with his mother or the striving growth of tomato vines in the sun confirms this impression.

As the hand involuntarily rises to aid the eye in tracing the stripes along their anatomical paths, the weight of the discipline and patience required to enact the forms becomes more fully apparent. There is something in the repetition that speaks to the quiet time of being alone, the slowing of attention, the focus on the detail, the moment, the breath, the patience and obsession, the extreme immersion in the details in life's textures and patterns. But there is also something that speaks to the possibility of finding and creating joy within that repetition, like growing tomatoes, like inventing mantras for the eye, like writing poems with your breath and then giving it all indelible form.