

THE BALANCE BETWEEN: JAMES WILSON RAYEN AND CHERYL CLINTON

Fountain Street Fine Art
59 Fountain Street
Framingham, Massachusetts

October 11 through November 4

A grid of small, photo-transfer canvases in progress on the studio wall dance with botanical ghost marks, both hidden and revealed under layers of acrylic and gel medium. While preparing for her October show with venerable landscape painter James Wilson Rayen, Fountain Street Fine Art (FSFA) gallery co-director Cheryl Clinton simultaneously tends her crop of small works destined for the cooperative gallery's first annual "CSArt" this fall. Shorthand for "Community Supported Art," CSArt functions much as the "CSA" (Community Supported Agriculture) does in the farmers' marketplace, where a limited number of advance shares are sold to raise "seed money" for a crop. At harvest time, shareholders receive equal portions; in FSFA's case, one original work each by six participating local artists.

Much like farming, CSArt requires many hours of hands-on labor for the participating artists, who have each committed 30 original, signed works to the yield. According to Clinton, the methodical process involved in tending her energetic small works balances well with the slow-cooked, heavily layered canvases she has slated for "The Balance Between," her double billing with Rayen.

For the show, Clinton pulls from her

"Woodland Series," an abstracted exploration of landscape inspired by the motion of light on water, transparency and reflective surfaces. Bodies of water loom large in Clinton's oeuvre — her early paintings isolated a slice of water, often seashore, with no horizon line. Her newer works are memory-based and woody — glimpses from the peripheral vision of a busy gallery owner/artist/mother shuttling between her Framingham studio building and Boylston home.

Rendered in a simple, organic palette of forest green, sky blue and sand, there is a floating, slippery quality to the compositions. No hard surfaces here — in Clinton's toolkit you'll find only vegetation, water and vapor. Light activates pigment particles frozen within the strata, "animating without being digital," explains Clinton. "You have what is happening on the surface at the same time as what is beneath, and in between. Maybe because I'm reaching the middle [of life] the work is a way of looking back and forward" at once.

Himself an avid gardener, James Wilson Rayen, like Clinton, is a landscape artist who identifies with the methodology of abstraction while yielding to memory. Now retired, the long-time faculty member at Wellesley College came up through Yale's undergraduate and M.F.A. programs during the tenure of Josef Albers, whose legendary color course impressed the younger Rayen so much that he enrolled in it twice over.

For Fountain Street, Rayen displays a series of landscapes inspired by the Charles River basin and its fecund marshlands. The viewer will notice Rayen's vaguely acidic palette and emphatically horizontal atmospheric cloud formations.

In "L'horizon Chimerique," Rayen stacks bundles of woolly clouds in queue across a strangely yellow ochre sky. While the inspiration of New England's cozy marshland lies beneath the landscape, in this and related works the suggestion of distance is greater, the marching clouds reminiscent of herds dotting the expanse of the Great Plains.



Cheryl Clinton, *Woodland Water 2*, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36".

Rayen's brushwork is not at all heavy-handed, yet his distinct mark-making is clearly the signature of an avid draftsman. A satin finish lets the viewer appreciate the artist's staccato brushwork — resulting in soft depth without pretense or gimmick.

In "Time, That Thief is Passing," the entire canvas vibrates with the invisible electricity of warm air and the memory of insect song. Friendly cirrus clouds keep time with the metronome of an underlying grid, receding lazily toward what I imagine to be the Blue Hills on the horizon line. Rayen insists on working from multiple studies, "as a rule ... to avoid copying from myself. After observation, memory becomes the driving force."

Meredith Cutler



James Wilson Rayen, *Time, That Thief is Passing*, oil on canvas, 48" x 48".