



Art Review: Darius Yektai: On Country Ground

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by Mike Solomon

“Darius Yektai: On Country Ground” at Tripoli Gallery in Southampton, NY

The six large paintings in “Darius Yektai: On Country Ground” at Tripoli Gallery in Southampton are all tied to being “in the country,” which is to say being at home for Yektai, who lives and works in a house in the woods in the Hamptons.

Perhaps, in his country lifestyle, he is like so many others who are seeking the more primal experience provided by living far from city life on the East End. In any event, one of the unifying themes of the paintings in the show is a kind of revelry in celebration of living in and with nature.

For me the most poignant example is *Tern 2*, which depicts the flighty creature skimming the surface of shimmering water. The wonderful thing about the painting is the artist’s use of silver paint to represent what truly is a quicksilver moment. The shiny liquid seems to ignite as the beak of the bird breaks the surface skimming for fish.

Tern 2 also breaks the rules of standard representation by depicting water with a material that is similar to it, rather than with a material that is manipulated to represent it. There is also a thick daub of tan paint just above the bird’s near wing, which contrasts to the tan unprimed canvas that provides most of the background to the scene. It’s this contradiction in textures and images that makes us stop and take notice.

This assertion and negation of the subject is central to Yektai’s approach to these paintings. As with so many artists rooted in expressionism (abstract and otherwise) there are always at least two subjects in play: the outer more obvious subject represented by “imagery” and the subject of the artist’s self, which they reveal through their gestures. For me, *Tern 2* contains the best proportions of all the elements the artist typically uses; representation, gesture, impasto and stains.



“Tern 2” by Darius Yektai, 2012. Oil, enamel, glitter on canvas, 42½ x 61½ inches. Photo Credit: © 2013 Gary Mamay. Courtesy Darius Yektai Studio.

In *From Tree to Sea*—a painting that evolved over several years before it was finished, and consequently seems to me the most resolved work in the show—the imagery is a celebration of coastal vagabonding. A figure hangs by his hands from a flowering tree branch on the beach. As his arms reach up above his head to grab the branch they also form that sacred posture of hallelujah, of praise of all that is wonderful.

As the figure looks out, we too look out, at the coastline shining in the sun and waves splashing in a cove beyond. But here also, upon close inspection, the surface is a provocative contradiction to the image. It is collaged and the tan surfer body has been painted with watercolor on paper, cut out and then squashed into a thick impasto of some black material, which oozes around it to form a dark outline. Though in fact it is thick black oil paint, it looks like roof tar.

So again, as in *Tern 2*, the way the artist uses different materials to render images breaks our expectations and asserts his interest in different forms of depiction. Drawn in to the magic of the scene by the sweeping vista stretching to the horizon, the viewer's eye is continually pulled back to contemplation of the somewhat mysterious figure, both by his position in the foreground and by the unusual way in which his presence is established.



“From Tree to Sea” by Darius Yektai, 2011- 2013. Oil, watercolor, charcoal, graphite on paper and linen, 68 x 64 inches. Photo Credit: © 2013 Gary Mamay. Courtesy Darius Yektai Studio.

In the big figurative painting, *The Boquet*, which seems to me more closely aligned to the idea of “On Country Ground” than any other, a figure stands within a dark forest-green background. The figure is approaching us, standing with arms partially outstretched; one arm has been repainted and seems to be hanging down somewhat tentatively.

Everything about the painting is so open, possibly as a reference to standing on “country ground,” although it might also be seen as vague or unresolved. This is a work for which the response really depends on the viewer and the mood, and that is perhaps what is good about this painting. It can seem too loosely assembled, or, for viewers responding to the emotion rather than the depiction, perhaps more purposeful.

It's quite a subjective dilemma, this one, and it relates to this show generally. Do we like artworks merely because of the marks that comprise them? Are we teased into greater appreciation or deeper consideration by the loose rendering of the imagery? Are the open spaces the point of the works, or merely context and background? There is clearly something happening here that has significance for the artist, and viewers must decide for themselves if these works resonate more strongly because of it.



"The Boquet" by Darius Yektai, 2012. Oil and watercolor on canvas, 96 x 72 inches. Photo Credit: © 2013 Gary Mamay. Courtesy Darius Yektai Studio.

A painting with less ambiguity is based on a seascape. In *Untitled*, the artist subsequently contradicted the scene he depicted by pouring thinners over the thicker paint, causing it to run down the canvas and in a sense "ruin" the possible image we think we see. This work shows how sumptuous and masterful Yektai can be with both his materials and his style of rendering.

The gray-green sky above the rich blue water with white reflections and dark blue foreground give hints of his command of representation, yet the deconstructive action shows how rebellious Yektai can be in these particular works.

Compared to his "wave paintings" (which will be featured at artMRKT Hamptons in Bridgehampton in July), I'm uncertain about the ambiguities in the paintings on view, as the wave painting series, some of which were briefly shown at Peter Marcelle Gallery this past winter, seem more affirmative and resolved to me.

Why Yektai establishes these vibrant contradictions between the image and the expectations the image seems to engender is perhaps the deeper question. I don't have any answers, but can only suggest that viewers, after seeing "On Country Ground," should consider revisiting the question at his upcoming show this summer. I certainly intend to.



"Untitled" by Darius Yektai, 2012. Oil and pastel on canvas, 72 x 96 inches. Photo Credit: © 2013 Gary Mamay. Courtesy Darius Yektai Studio.

BASIC FACTS: "Darius Yektai: On Country Ground" is on view from May 23 to June 20 at Tripoli Gallery, 30 Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. tripoligallery.com.