



IN STUDIO: Susan Vecsey's Meditations on Landscape

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by Esperanza Leon

One has to negotiate the labyrinthine roads that lead toward Cedar Point Park to pay a visit to the East Hampton studio of Susan Vecsey. It is an intimate workspace at her home in the Northwest Woods that she has currently set up to use on a more regular basis, having given up a studio space she occupied in Manhattan, where she lives part-time.

Skylights and windows filter light into the space, the surrounding deciduous and evergreen trees casting shadows through the blinds. It has airiness and functionality, along with the certain order one usually finds in even the most disheveled of studios.

Dry pigment jars are lined up and paint tubes are arranged by color on white shelves mounted on white walls upon which the artist has taped up strips of color charts, wheels, and studies. Points of pure and diluted hues appear throughout the room, drawing one's eye to the tools of the trade. All of this, in combination with the paint-splattered wood floor, transmits the quintessential picture of a working painter's studio.



Pigments and frame samples.



Color wheels and studio implements.



Color charts and paints in the studio.

Color and atmosphere play paramount roles in Vecsey's process. She describes her work, on one hand, as akin to late 19th century [Tonalism](#), with which she shares the effect of mist and mood,

albeit in a brighter, lighter palette. [Color Field](#) painting is the other American style she relates with, as she stains her linens with oil paints in expanses of color, creating abstracted landscapes that emphasize the geometry of the forms and their arrangement within the picture space.



“Morning Light at Northwest Harbor, East Hampton” by Susan Vecsey. Oil on paper, 39 x 49 inches (diptych, each 24.5 x 39 inches).

Although she does not devote herself to painting *en plein air*, her work develops from direct observation taken down in perfunctory drawings or quick charcoal studies on the pages of numerous sketch books that also contain countless color studies and charts exploring how certain hues might work individually and together.



Sketchbook with color chart.



Sketchbooks with studies for compositions.



Studies for “Untitled (Gray Waves).”

The “real” colors of a landscape do not transfer to her final painting. Rather, she might set out to investigate how a red hue will play out in a composition. Or, as with the painting *White Main Beach* (2012), recently acquired for the Permanent Collection of the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton and included in the just-past “Landscape Selections” exhibition there, she will simply decide she wants to devote herself to creating a white painting.



“Untitled (Grey Waves)” by Susan Vecsey, 2013. Oil on linen, 32 x 59 inches.



“White Main Beach” by Susan Vecsey, East Hampton, 2012. Oil on linen, 37.5 x 51.5 inches, Guild Hall Museum Permanent Collection, East Hampton, NY.

These meditations on landscape are captivating for their lack of specificity as much as their relation with this part of the world, which is an easy association.

Vecsey is one of those artists who might influence viewers to look at the natural landscape and see it as she represents it in her paintings, analyzing and breaking down the landscape to its most essential forms, with a low horizon line or one-point perspective anchoring the arrangement. For the artist, formal concerns are paramount.



“Untitled 32 (Ditch Plains, Montauk)” by Susan Vecsey, 2010. Oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches, Private Collection.

All of the paintings have rich, pigmented surfaces, whether Vecsey employs intense or subdued hues. The materials she chooses are of utmost importance: quality linens, pigments and paints; solid stretchers; simple stained wood frames. She explains that she almost always works on one painting at a time, undertaking and enjoying every part of the process, including assembling the stretchers and stretching the linen.

Interesting textures in the linen are sometimes allowed to show through by leaving parts unpainted, just as the wood grain of the frame might be exposed through the subtle stains. The organic nature of the materials is encouraged in its supporting role.



“Untitled (Pink)” by Susan Vecsey, 2013. Oil on linen, 35.5

x 35.5 inches.



“Untitled (Green Nocturne)” by Susan Vecsey, 2013. Oil on linen, 41 x 47 inches.

Vecsey develops several small compositional studies, having first explored potential color combinations in her intensely studied and elaborate color charts. Working in diluted oils, she stains linen or paper in thin veils using a palette knife or brushes. Her technique approximates more to watercolor, as there is a degree of control over the paint that she must maintain as it seeps and absorbs into the support. She cannot simply paint over any application that goes awry.

A methodical, careful, investigative approach is paired with an experimental and lyrical sensibility in the work of this rather atypical artist. From age 14, Vecsey explored art and studied with artists regularly, including throughout her studies at Barnard College and Columbia University, from which she obtained degrees. Parental insistence on having a traditionally stable profession caused her to pursue a career in finance, which she abandoned in 2008 to devote herself completely to making art.



“Untitled, 2008” by Susan Vecsey. Oil on linen, 38 x 52 inches.



“Toward Cedar Point, East Hampton” by Susan Vecsey, 2012. Oil on linen, 27 x 38 inches (diptych, each 19 x 27 inches).

Vecsey’s first solo show on the East End at Ashawagh Hall in 2008 caught the attention of the [Spanierman Gallery](#) outpost in East Hampton at that time, which took the work on, including it in group shows beginning in 2009. She had her first solo show with the gallery in its Manhattan location the following year. Meanwhile, she pursued and completed an MFA in painting at the [New York Studio School](#). One could say she has enjoyed the best of two worlds and has had the diligence and intuition to navigate all of it with success.

Like many other artists, Vecsey believes that exploring different mediums is essential and she has

worked in photography, monoprints, and, more recently, printmaking with [Solarplate](#), a non-traditional etching technique. In a workshop at [Guild Hall](#) with [Dan Welden](#), innovator of this printmaking method, Vecsey created the print *Storm* that is part of a group exhibition, “First Impressions,” on view at the museum through the end of February. She plans to pursue a series of editions in this medium.



“Storm” by Susan Vecsey, 2013. Solarplate print (Edition of 25), 4 x 5 inches



Vecsey in her studio.

Susan Vecsey’s artistic journey continues to develop and flourish as she joins the group of artists represented by [Berry Campbell](#) in the Chelsea gallery district of Manhattan, which includes Frank Bowling, Gertrude Greene, Balcomb Greene, Edward Avedisian, Ann Purcell, and Eric Dever. The gallery will be including Vecsey’s work at [Art Wynwood](#) held in Miami this week.

BASIC FACTS: Susan Vecsey’s art can be viewed at www.susanvecsey.com. Susan Vecsey’s work is represented by **Berry Campbell**. The gallery is located in Chelsea at 530 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011. www.berrycampbell.com.

“First Impressions: Printmaking with Dan Welden and Solarplate Etching” remains on view through Feb. 23 at Guild Hall Museum, 158 Main Street, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.guildhall.org

Art Wynwood is being held from Feb. 13 to 17, 2014 in the Wynwood Arts District in Miami. www.artwynwood.com.

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