

# Sally Breen Captures the Sublime in Paintings of the Ocean

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by Pat Rogers

Artist Sally Breen is no stranger to the ocean. The Atlantic is her neighbor, providing the opportunity to easily witness the ocean's every mood. As a painter, Breen is attuned to changing nuances in both sky and sea as well as the impact light imparts on surfaces, clouds and colors that appear and disappear as swiftly as the winds.

Then there's the ocean itself: ever in motion, its curling waves breaking on sands or its bobbing whitecaps that stretch into beds of deep blue until the eye can't distinguish one from the next. Greens, unusual yellows and frothy whites mix liberally with blues of all hues in momentary stews before remixing to reform in another visual palette.

The Water Mill artist has been painting the ocean for around 20 years. Most recently, her work has migrated to embrace a softer touch. Realism remains but has eased into the capturing the essence of transitory moments combined with Breen's portrayal of Hamptons seascapes. Two series of new paintings are currently on view in the group show "Balancing Act: Beauty N Execution" at The White Room Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY.

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“Rippled” by Sally Breen. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Majesty*, 2018, Breen channels luminous landscapes found in photography with skies and cloud that shimmer and glow, revealing colors created when Mother Nature is at her best. This painting is one of the pinnacles from the new series that encapsulates the essence of fleeting moments, captured on canvas. Commanding when viewed in person, *Majesty* offers what it feels like to be alone on a Hamptons beach and swept away by the utter beauty provided by nature, a poignant reminder of why The Hamptons continues to draw people to its shores.



“Majesty” by Sally Breen. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

The painting followed a new series of small painting sketches Breen made over the winter, Breen said. Working in 48 inches square, the smaller surface had Breen considering what was the most important element to include in the sketches. Working quickly, she decided to go more minimal and see what would happen.

The works in the “Color Sketches” series allowed Breen to grab passing moments witnessed as a daily watcher of the sea and sky. The quality of the light as an important element in each of the sketches. So is imparting mood and atmosphere through compositions that are imaginative instead of a strict attachment to realism. Horizon lines continue to be crucial compositional elements creating a solid grounding for the paintings, Breen said.



“Color Sketch 1” by Sally Breen. Oil on board, 8 x 8 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist.



“Color Sketch 2” by Sally Breen. Oil on board, 8 x 8 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist.

“I’m more interested in the movement and the sense of transition,” Breen said. “I do representative art but want the emotion of the scene to come through. The series were fun to do. They’re small and were quick sketches that I could make while my grandkids were over. There are so many fleeting moments in the ocean and sky. The colors change so quickly and I was wondering ‘How do I remember these moments?’ The sketches were the answer.”



"Color Sketch 3" by Sally Breen. Oil on board, 8 x 8 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist.



“Color Sketch 5” by Sally Breen. Oil on board, 8 x 8 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist.

When she turned to studio to make larger scale work, an accidental purchase of canvas that was larger than her usual size ushered a change to her painting practice. Following on the heels of working 8 x 8 inches, the 72 x 60 inch surface had Breen spending considerable time with the painting, allowing for discoveries to unfold.

Breen translated the practices from the “Color Sketch” series and focused on capturing the emotional essence of each scene. Mood and atmosphere were coaxed into powerful elements through layers of color and the nuances of light as it strikes curls of water, clouds and ocean surfaces.



"East End Lace 2" by Sally Breen. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy the artist and The White Room Gallery.

While most of Breen's paintings are oceanscapes, the show also features a rare scene from the woods experienced in November. *Thanksgiving Woods* combines the sensation of being surrounded by dense thickets of trees and the welcome sunlight that cuts through to dapple brushy floors and illuminate secreted places.





“Thanksgiving Woods” by Sally Breen. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Sally Breen’s art joins paintings, photography or mixed media works by E.J. Camp, John Mazlish and Joan Kondel. The exhibition is a beautiful one showing the nuances of the natural world and the ways form and motion can enliven artworks as well as the art that surrounds it.

“In the curating of ‘Balancing Act,’ the challenge was to balance the movement and beauty that each artist brought to the exhibit,” The White Room Gallery Co-Director Kat O’Neill wrote in an email. “The sculptural quality of metal and mesh hangs alongside oil paintings of the ocean in all its rhythmic tranquility. Photography enhanced the beauty of nature in the abstract as well as in its most realistic form. The outcome, or, more to the point, what the viewer can expect: That wonderful feeling of hmmm...this is really something.”

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**BASIC FACTS:** Sally Breen is a painter based in Water Mill, NY. Her art can be seen by visiting [www.sallybreen.com](http://www.sallybreen.com).

“Balancing Act: Beauty N Execution” is on view through July 8, 2018 at The White Room Galley, 2415 Main Street, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. For details, visit [www.thewhiteroom.gallery](http://www.thewhiteroom.gallery).

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