



JULIAN HATTON



Island, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

cover: *Make Your Own Weather, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas*

Julian Hatton

No Crazy, No Mountain
recent paintings

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elizabeth harris gallery

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ehgallery.com



So Far, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

No Crazy, No Mountain

Julian Hatton

New York, October 2021

I encountered the phrase “no crazy, no mountain” this spring, while reading a friend’s memoir*. He was referring to a mountain climber** who used it before losing his life in 2018 on his eighth attempt to summit Mt. Everest, without supplemental oxygen. Then, in June, I went hiking in the Sierras and Cascades with a friend, Charles Carroll, a real mountaineer. He knows firsthand the mysterious hold mountains can have on you. Our day hikes, through the mountains around Yosemite, Calaveras Big Trees State Park and Lassen Volcanic National Park, scratched the surface of what can become an obsession. I could feel it. It was enough for me to recognize, with wry bemusement, the allegorical similarities of obsessive mountain climbing with a life-long commitment to painting.



Twizzle, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

You don't have to be crazy to want a career in the arts, which in my case is painting. But you do need to get over your fear and try. Maybe that's where a dose of craziness comes in handy, to get you to try. It is sort of a dream, a successful career in painting, or at least it was for me, when I started. A lot of people tried to talk me out of it, but I just had to try. Only when you're on the mountain will you be able to figure it out, whether or not you're cut out for this sort of life. The rewards can be like nothing else, the sense of wonder and deep satisfaction that comes from something you painted that you really like, and, more importantly, that others do as well. Painting continues to take all I can give it, and it never gets any easier. When I look back on where I've been over the past four decades, it does seem like a little craziness has its place.

The paintings in this show and catalog comprise the bulk of my efforts since my last show at Elizabeth Harris Gallery in 2019. They are mostly in two sizes, 10x10 inches and 60x60 inches. The ideas and impetus behind these paintings varies.

The small paintings in the catalog (10 x10 inches) were painted mostly in 2020, before the larger ones. The words "what if" continued to pop into my head as the paintings progressed. "What if" means, "what if I follow my intuition and try out a new painting idea?". I followed these "what if's a



Reflection, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

lot. *Twizzel*, *Reflection*, *Island*, *Midnight* are a few examples. *Twizzel* went through many re-workings. I could probably keep going with all of them, playing with more “what if”s but sometimes it’s better to admit you could go on forever and stop and enjoy what you have.

My work has always been a combination of representation and abstraction, of naturalism and imagination, inspired by nature. The early paintings, all made en plein air, from the 80s and 90s, worked for me because they melded an abstract and representational vocabulary with an idiosyncratic response to natural surroundings. Those attributes still apply today.

I work on both large and small paintings with equal interest. It’s not my intention to paint a small painting in preparation for a larger one, nor for any reason other than to create a perfectly independent statement, a small painting that holds up to scrutiny on its own. One advantage of working small is that I can explore ideas quickly, ideas about imaginary places, usually alluding to landscape. Essentially these small paintings help me discover new and exciting schemes — compositions and painting methods that differ a lot from painting to painting.

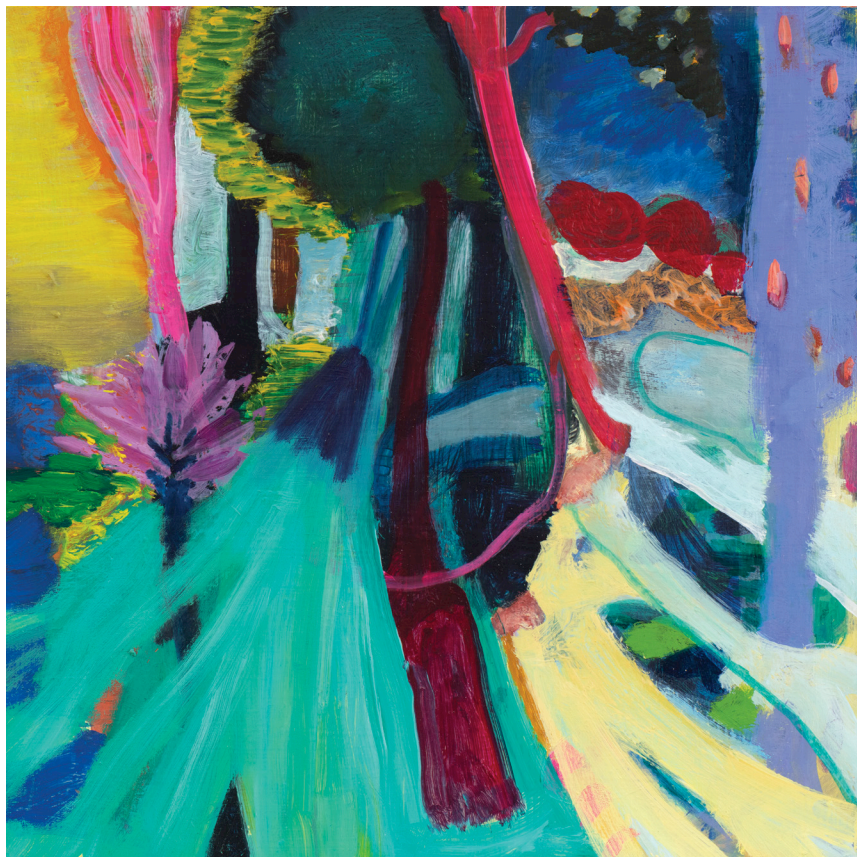
Unlike a few years ago, I can take almost any starting point — a charcoal drawing, a photo, an old painting — and respond intuitively, and paint from there, feeling relatively unconstrained.



South Pacific, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

It follows that I rarely get stuck. Perhaps it's an aspect of my method that when I act on some ideas, although they might not work out, they don't blind me to my next move. My desire since 2019 has been to make more complicated, invented compositions, using the visual cues and symbols of landscape. In the past, I often had intentional constraints on my trial-and-error method, like trying to maintain a shallow space or avoiding caricatured drawing. Now the ineffable logic of the painting seems to reveal itself much sooner, and that helps me feel like anything goes. And that is a good mindset for me and an ideal for many painters. Of course, that phrase "anything goes" means something different to every artist. But it does help me understand why my compositions vary a lot. I've never been able to repeat a limited number of moves, restricting my mark-making vocabulary, without feeling inhibited. Perhaps this is at the root of why some painters change styles when they do? Maybe boredom and inhibition and the need to try a new method, form or style are related?

I should remind viewers that my process remains largely improvisational and spontaneous, to the extent that I respond to the painting as it develops on the canvas, not as it might have been conceived before I started. I love having the freedom to radically change the direction of a painting at any point. And the initial sketch on the canvas, sometimes over a background color, grows out of something related to nature, maybe a feeling from being



No Rush, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

in it, or a visual reference, or a charcoal drawing or another painting. I draw constantly and I'm usually thinking about forms in an imaginary space. You can see some examples on my Instagram feed, @julian3hatton.

It's also easier to stay in touch with small paintings when events outside the studio are very distracting. On 9/11 I watched the World Trade Towers collapse from a roof 20 blocks north. Events in recent times including politics and the pandemic have been equally distracting. Dealing with traumatic events and continuing to paint is difficult. But while grappling with such negative emotions, it is important to remember that one reason we work so hard to maintain a healthy society is to have opportunities for enjoyment. And that includes painting.

I was thinking quite a bit about the hiking trip in the Sierras when I painted several of the 60x60 inch paintings, like *Make Your Own Weather*, *Magic Wand* and *Revelation*. And the drives through California's Central Valley, the Pacific coast, the hilly vineyards, the dead dry fields influenced works like *Incantation*, *Sanctuary* and *Tourniquet*. I've been in parts of California before, but I've never heard a voice in my head say, "I know how to use this in a painting!" So, I took a lot of photos, on the mountain trails or from the car's passenger seat, while composing virtual paintings in my head. I never painted from the photos back in the studio. I just kept looking at them.



Slip, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

I think my work on the small paintings in 2020 helped prepare me to see the California landscape as a good starting point. Perhaps hiking made the difference, hour upon hour of going up, hour upon hour of coming down. A different pace compared to the studio routine, but in similar ways engaging and transforming.

I have not painted en plein air for many years. But while painting the upper portions of several of these canvases set up on the deck outside my upstate NY studio, I enjoyed responding to the cloudy skies overhead. Clouds are so cool. Skies used to be so hard to paint. Now, they just happen. I can't explain it.

I'm still fascinated with the illusion and artifice possible in painting, such as the notion that the painted surface can be a window into the imaginary world. And it continues to amaze me that, in our fast-changing digital age, contemporary paintings that use primitive tools and techniques like animal hair tied to sticks designed for manipulating colored dirt on a flat surface, can still provoke profound feelings.

My compositions, just like when my painting first came together in the late 80s, still follow a passion for vistas, wide open spaces, tangles of foliage, recessions into vanishing points. Nature still has a hold on me, in that



Grove, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

Emersonian way. Emerson, as my wife reminds me, separated the idea of transcendence from ecclesiastical control and the church of his time. He wrote about nature in a way that made it something worthy of reverence in and of itself. I find nature deeply affecting. I'm lucky to be able to spend time in NYC as well as in nature, in rural upstate New York, where my wife and I have studios. And, although I can see how the climate is changing, my paintings are not primarily about climate change or the environment. They tend to be more about attitudes conveyed by painting inspired by nature, such as vitality and optimism, because, despite my initial shyness when meeting strangers, I tend to be lively and upbeat. My paintings are in the landscape tradition, not observed but invented. They're also about me, to the extent all paintings reflect the personality and intelligence of the artist.

We can all use a helping hand in our climb up this allegorical mountain, in our aspiration to contribute to contemporary culture in a significant way, by making and sharing art. And we can all use some luck. Both are important and I've benefitted from my fair share of both. I must thank gallerist Elizabeth Harris and director Miles Manning for their continued faith in art and in me. And I need to thank all the painters and artists who have been on the mountain at one time or another. You know what it's like, and there's no substitute for experience. I couldn't continue without a



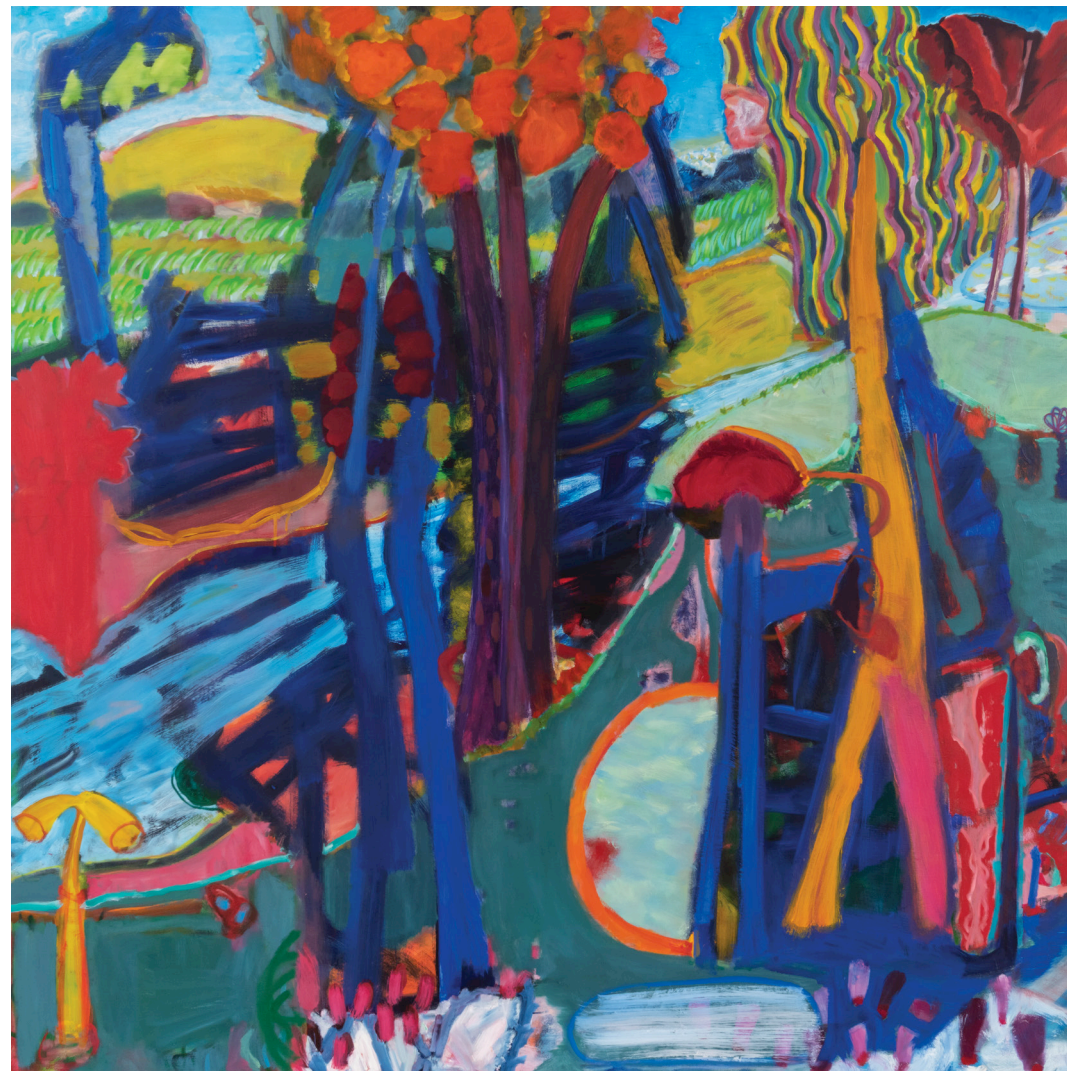
Midnight, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

community that puts painting — this amazing and demanding obsession — first. Every painter contributes to the cultural conversation. In that sense we're all roped together. It helps everyone on the mountain. I must also acknowledge the importance of all curators, critics, writers, gallerists, institutions, foundations, the related past, present and future professionals, and, not last and by no means least, collectors for their continued commitment and support, their belief in the arts and in painting. We couldn't keep climbing without you.

* "The Mud the Blood and The Beer", 2020-21, by Bill Carney, aka Claremont Ferrand, founder and front man of Le Sans Culottes, faux-French rock band. And writer of the song, "No Crazy, No Mountain", on the CD, BILL CARNEY, Songs in English, 2020.

**Nobukazu Kuriki

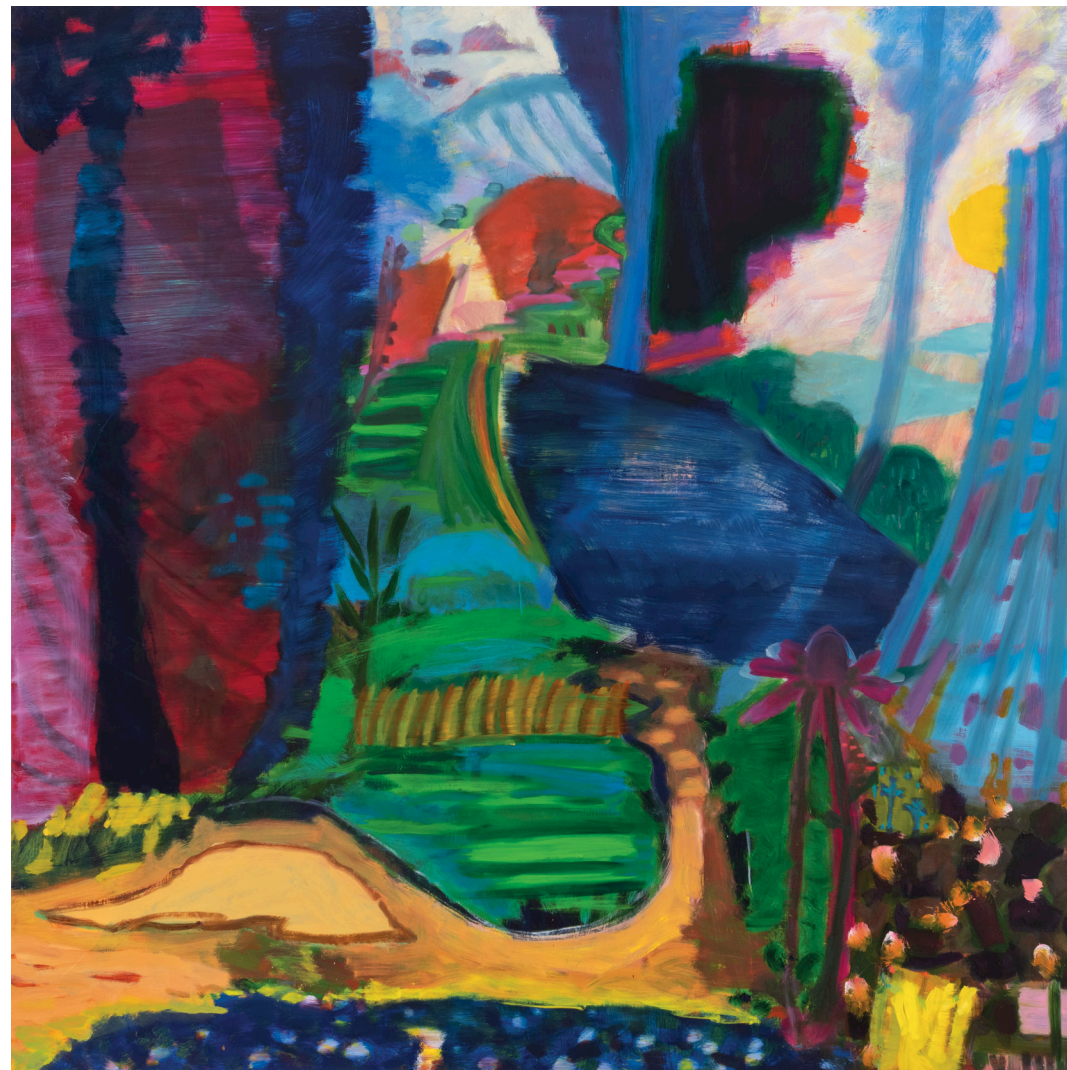
Crossing, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



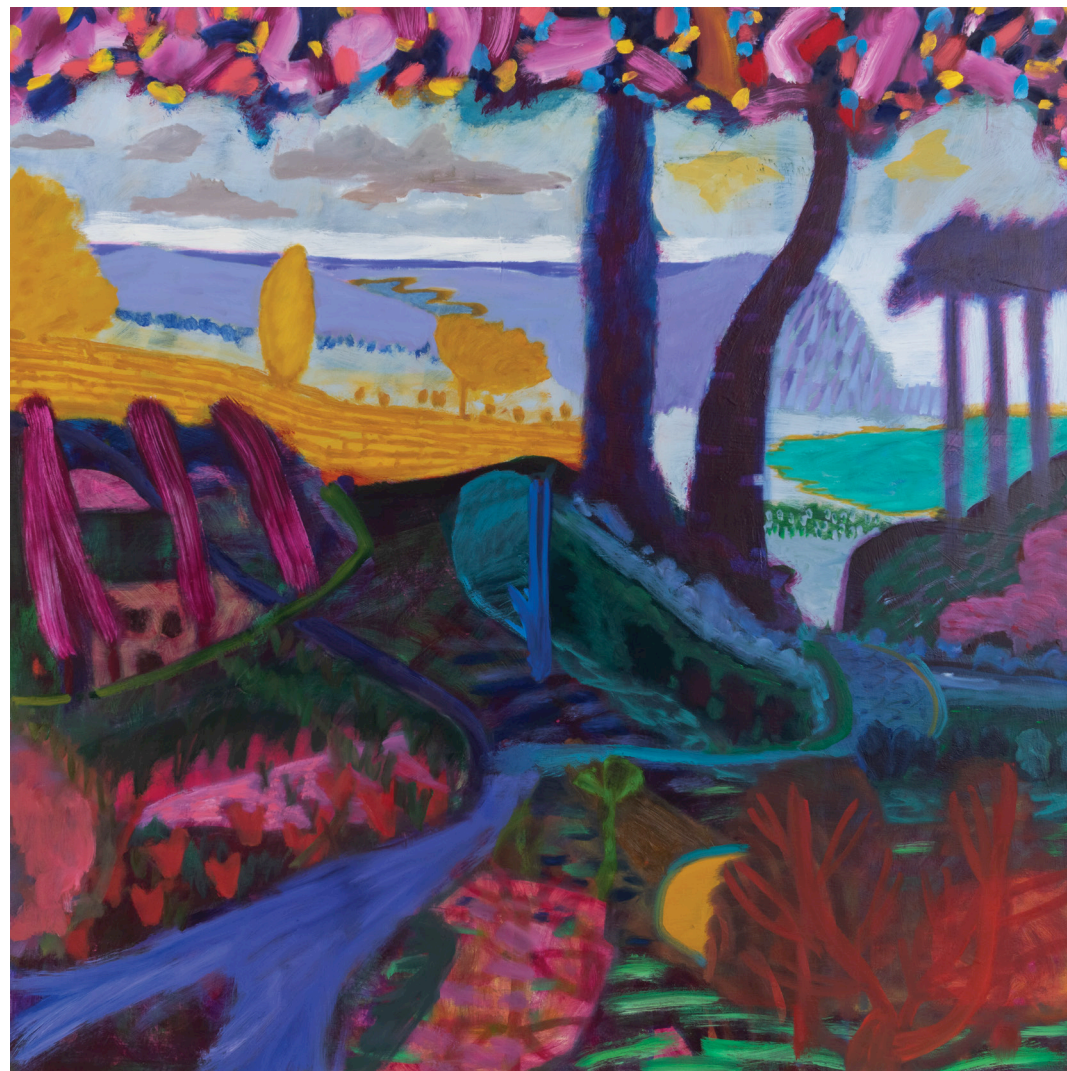
Quagmire, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



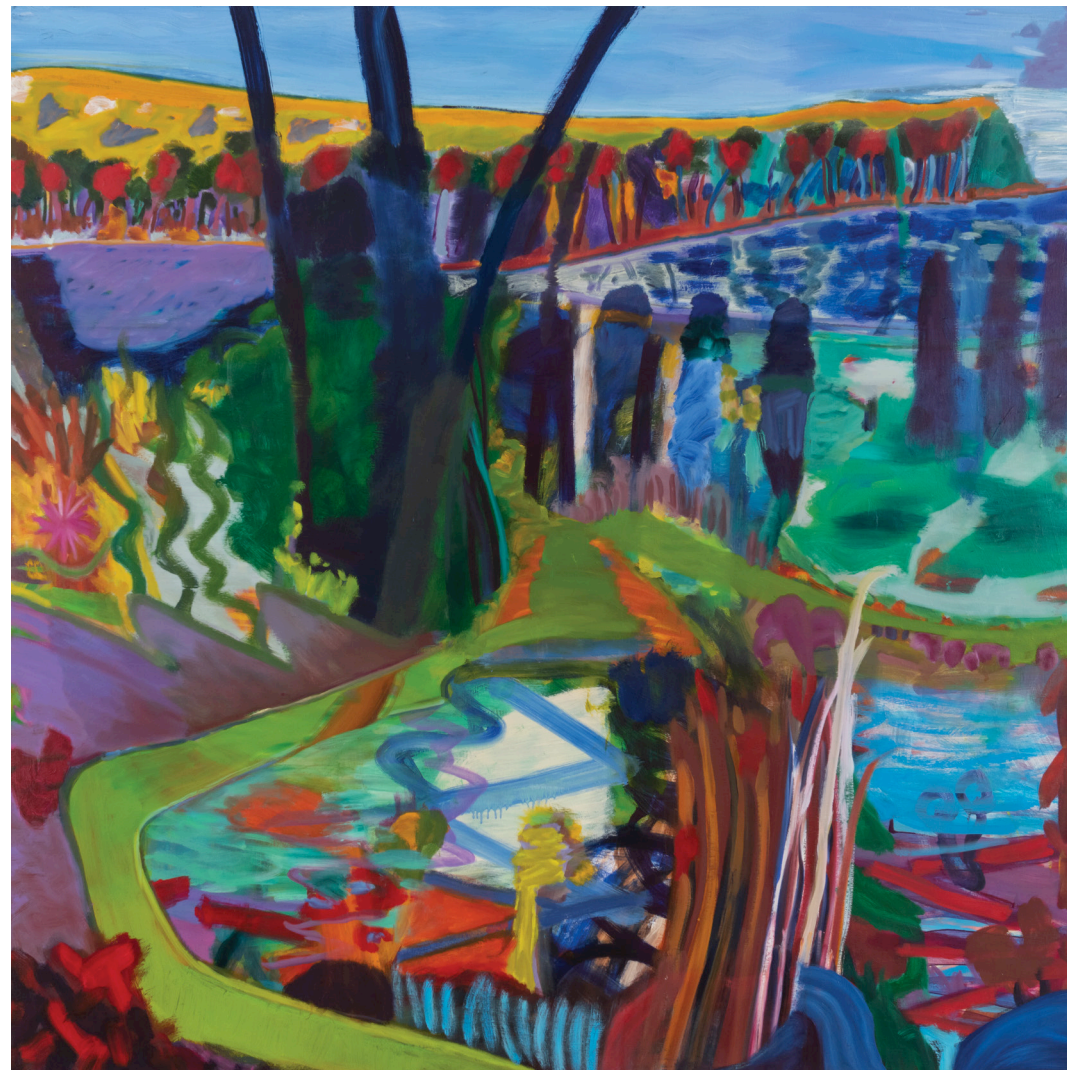
Revelation, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



Incantation, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



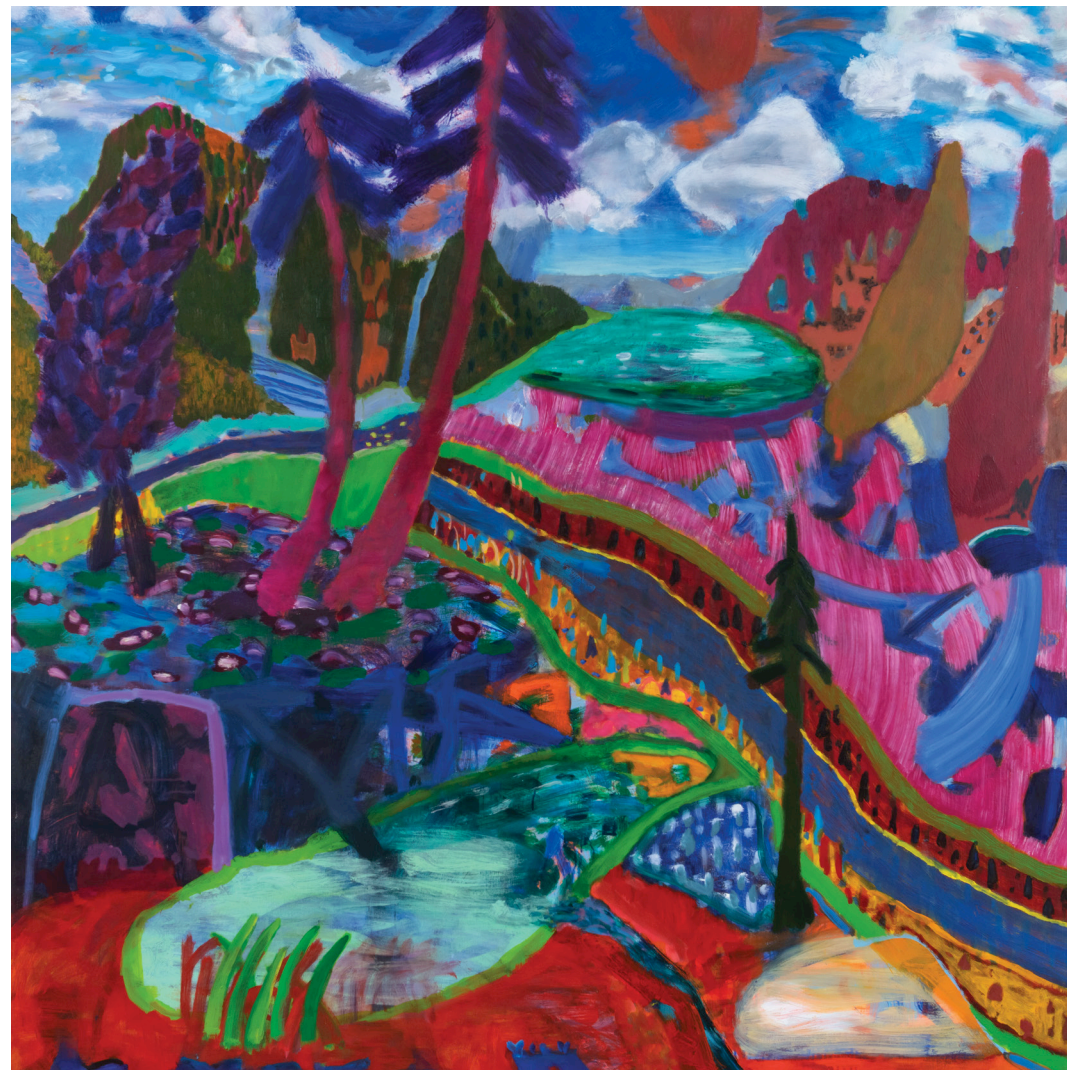
Sanctuary, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



Tournequet, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



Magic Wand, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



Make Your Own Weather, 2021, 60 x 60", oil on canvas

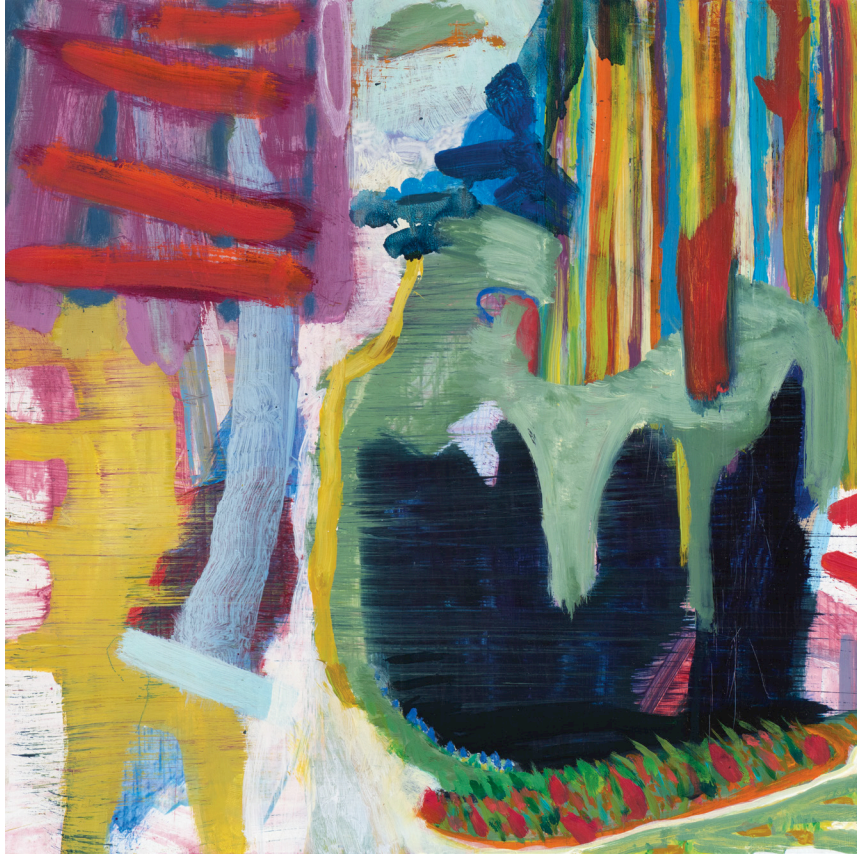


Big Lake, 2020, 34 x 38", oil on canvas



Glint, 2020, 48 x 54", oil on canvas





A Hold On Me, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



Chasing Down A Dream, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



Come-A-Along, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



Go Figure, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



Beyond Words, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



Big Sur, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel



many thanks to:

Alison Berry

Elizabeth Harris

Miles Manning

Charles Carroll

Bill Carney

Mark Sheinkman

Holly Sears

Fritz and Caren Hatton

Mom

Dad (r.i.p.)

Family, friends and colleagues once
and still on the mountain

Stand For Something, 2020, 10 x 10", oil on panel

elizabeth harris gallery