



Cynthia Hartling, *Otranto #1*, 2013, oil on linen, 30.5 x 27"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Cynthia Hartling
Paintings**

εὐρίσκω *heurisko* : “to find, discover”

January 17 - March 30, 2014

The Michael S. Currier Center Gallery

The Putney School, Elm Lea Farm

418 Houghton Brook Road

Putney, Vermont 05346

Reception: Friday, January 17, 7-9pm.

Artist Talk: Calder Hall, Friday, January 17, 10am.

To encounter the paintings of Cynthia Hartling is to come face to face with a rare and true treasure: a pure painter, admirably in the thrall of a medium whose qualities she is both master of and servant to, whose potential she has been exploring for years, but whose persistent mysteries continually compel her to probe more deeply. Hartling’s creative tendency is to be a searcher, a discoverer, a finder, of form, color, significance, and meaning, rather than a maker *ex nihilo*. She is one of those painters who find countless ways to let paint be paint, who approach the medium as if it were an organism whose behavior is best studied under a microscope, and not so much manipulate it as pursue it (and, on occasion, subdue it) over the prescribed plane of a board or canvas, of no set dimensions. While “nature”—whether the woody depths and vast plains of Wyoming or the sunlit vistas and aqua blue sea of Otranto—remains her revered starting point, from there she is on her own, probing, slashing, pouring, wiping, tidying, messing, undoing, and then tidying again—for how else could a search unfold, without some backtracking?

I do not arbitrarily choose the term “finder” to refer to what Cynthia Hartling does as she paints. There is precedent for the use of a group of words associated with “finding” or “discovering” to characterize artistic creativity. One of the terms used by Plato and others to describe what the visual artist does is εὕρισκω (*heurisko*, “to find, find out, discover”). [i] In Latin, the equivalent is *invenio* (“to come upon, find, meet with, light upon”) and the one who does this is an inventor (“a contriver, author, discoverer, inventor”), though the artist is no longer regarded as a prime example of this activity.

Hartling’s relationship with her muse, nature, is neither peripheral nor merely sentimental. For nature itself is an artist. The mimetic image made as if by chance from nature’s own hand has historically been an object of curiosity, as a number of preserved anecdotes make clear. [ii] Pliny’s stories attributing the origins of painting and of the modeling of portraits (*Natural History* 35. 15, 151) to the act of tracing the accidental shadow of a man on a wall attest to a fascination with the skills, techniques, and inspirational sources of artists. [iii] Apart from being entertaining and demonstrative of what some might regard as an ingenuous attitude toward artmaking, these myths are almost certainly related to or even inspired by real studio practices.

The ways of art, to the layperson, are so unfathomable that nature itself offers the only worthy comparison. On the other hand, for the maker, while much of the “mystery” translates into painstaking, and often backbreaking, labor, it re-emerges when he or she beholds with amazement the “creation.” For Hartling, the *modus operandi* is to work at one or more paintings over the course of days, weeks, and even months, and even to return on occasion to a canvas once decreed “finished” in order to revive the process of pulling form out of medium, of coaxing shape and color into arraying themselves somehow into perfectly coherent abstract configurations which remain yet attached, if only by a thread, to their referents in the world of nature. Consequently, there are no finished paintings. It is as if the forms, shapes, and configurations of colors she “finds” preserve their natural tendency to amorphism, and are as likely to disengage from their arrangement and reorder themselves as they are to maintain their precarious and misleading state of fixedness. These are painted surfaces that are lush with texture and sing of the medium and the materials, that insinuate themselves into the viewer’s space in spite of the painter’s efforts to restrain them, that seem to resist all efforts to take their sum. As if in defiance of the painterly action of moving and manipulating medium within the confines of an indifferently rectangular allotment of surface, the medium finds its way to expressing itself in a world of its own devising and its own rules of engagement, a world which is, in the end, self-reflexive, and where the searching mind and hand of the painter is the only directive.

In “releasing” the “discovered” imagery onto the canvas, Cynthia Hartling is a true “finder,” in the Platonic sense, which should (if it does not) make her feel very powerful indeed. As such, she performs a public service: that is, we get to gaze. But then again, so does she: Yes, it is through the labor of her person that such arresting forms, shapes, colors, and images are made to adhere to a swatch of linen and present themselves before our eyes; yet it must also be true that, with the creative act complete, the creator/finder merely joins the ranks of other beholders as we stand in awe of what has been revealed.

Mary Stieber, 2014

[i] For example, at *Symposium* 209a, *demiourgoi* (“makers, skilled craftsmen”) are called *heuretikoí*; the cumulative evidence of the dialogues suggests that Plato respects artists who “find” or “discover” over those who are more literally “inspired” from an outside source. The verb is used of poetic composition at Pindar’s *Pythian Ode* 1. 60, while the noun is used of the creator of a work of art at *Olympian Ode* 13. 17. Daidalos, the archetypal artist/architect/engineer is referred to as a “finder, inventor” in a passage from Diodorus’ *History* 4. 76. 1.

[ii] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36. 14; Cicero, *De divinatione* 1. 13. 23.

[iii] *Natural History* 35. 15, 151

Cynthia Hartling was born in Albany, New York and lives and works in New York City. She received her BFA from Cooper Union, New York and has also studied at the Istituto Statale d’Arte in Urbino, Italy and SUNY, New Paltz. Her work has been shown in exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Pierogi, Janet Kurnatowski Gallery, Centotto, STOREFRONT, Side-show, Berkshire Museum, and Beverley Knowles Fine Art, in London. She was awarded a Carlo Cego Fellowship at BAU Institute, Otranto, Italy in 2013 and nominated for a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant in 2012. Past fellowships include a Milton and Sally Michel Avery endowed residency for visual arts at Yaddo, a Barbara White endowed painting award at Vermont Studio Center, Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts, VCCA, Fundacion Valparaiso, Art Farm, and Jentel.

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