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Window's Winnow, 65 x 43 in., oil, dye, bleach, and graphite on linen with beveled pine and marble, 2021

A = 42?
B = 58?
C = 72

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Eleanor Conover (b. 1988, Hartford, CT) joined the Dickinson College faculty as Assistant Professor of Art in 2021. Recent exhibitions include Able Baker Contemporary (Portland, ME), Bad Water (Knoxville, TN), and Ortega y Gasset Projects (Brooklyn, NY). She was the 2020-21 recipient of the Wellesley College Alice C. Cole '42 Fellowship, awarded to an outstanding early career painter or sculptor. She holds an MFA from the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University (2018), and a BA from Harvard College (2010); she received a post-MFA teaching fellowship at the School of Art, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her praxis has been supported through residencies including Cow House Studios, Vermont Studio Center, and the Joseph A. Fiore Art Center, and her work has been featured in *New American Paintings* magazine.

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THE TROUT GALLERY

THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

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ELEANOR
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There is always a ghost present while approaching paintings.

It's sensate, though its sensory effects more than likely do not transmit cognitively. Thusly the ghost. At times, it is only noticed when pointed out. Much of what entails what a painting is, conversationally and at times theoretically, routinely relates to the thematic nature found within the *four walls* it presents itself in. The hand of the artist, color, subject matter, figuration, abstraction, composition, and so on. Moves made inside the chessboard. We tend to speak about a painting's *objecthood* when this stubborn phantom is uncloaked. This is not something new of course, but even when becoming cognizant of a painting's rectangularity or squareness, it often tends to travel unnoticed. We are recurrently inclined to call it an *object* when this angularity somehow becomes dethroned.

If I were having a conversation with Eleanor concerning her work, the catalyst would unlikely be this. What we often speak about mostly comes from the external logic that impels the form. This externality, however, is also deeply internal. Eleanor is an inside/outside person, meaning that her praxis of living, thinking, and making is of a constant traffic of going out and coming in.

To give the viewer context as they peruse the work, I choose to start from the physical perimeters. One might take the strange circumferential construct of Eleanor's paintings as an inventive rebellion against the rectangularity of capital-*P* painting, inimical to the patriarchal lopsided canon of art history. Though I would not deny this plausible fact, such an act does not seem calculated but wholeheartedly felt and arrived at through numerous pretexts.

The late artist and poet Etel Adnan, rest in peace, wrote: "Coming to see Cezanne in order to think about womanhood seems absurd. . . . And, of course, it isn't. It's by establishing relationships, that I begin to think. . . . That's the way it is."¹

To provisionally anchor ourselves in Cezanne in order to address Eleanor and the work would not only pose a predicament: it would deviate from a myriad of important components within her praxis. I'm solely establishing



Mise en Abyme, 67 x 48 in., oil, acrylic, dye, bleach, graphite, and marker on linen with beveled pine, 2021

a relationship. Cezanne's correspondence to the landscape, Mont Sainte-Victoire, to the earth, resonates deeply here. Perhaps even more apropos is the Cezannic spirit that led toward Cubism and much of abstraction. Both are equally valid trajectories of parallel. In this somewhat established relationship with Cezanne, the structures of her canvases begin to resemble the actual physique of the mountains where she spends so much time. Whereas Cezanne was reinventing painting via facture, observation, and the conflation of disparate lines of sight, Eleanor follows suit in conflating her subject matter(s) not only within the painted subject but also in the architectonics of the built structure of her canvases. Unlike Cezanne, she is building the mountain rather than solely painting it, dying the fabric with found pigment from places she frequents and at other times with synthetic pigments and acrylic paint. The aforementioned inside/outside modus operandi has changed over the years, but it remains intact. At first, Eleanor devoted time to painting, making indexical rubbings from specific locations and sketches on site that she continued working on back in her studio. Within the past three years, she began collecting stones and marble pieces and deriving pigment from dirt, which she would then add to the paintings. She dyes her canvases utilizing extracted tints and acrylic paint, but also lifts artificially dyed surfaces with bleach.

The color and staccato-like fashion of her facture may propose another connection to Cezanne. The difference here is that the oil paint applied by Eleanor atop the roughly pigmented surface is often subsumed in the thread of the canvas, so that from far away they seem to resemble Cezanne but upon closer inspection resonate more closely with Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Morris Louis, and Sam Gilliam. The ontology of fabric, if you will, of sewing (collage and Cubism) and of dyeing is of significance and tied to her mother, who studied fashion design.

The stretcher bars that indexically appear from behind may be reminiscent of windows that double down metaphorically as *painting*, though they more profoundly bestow a tip of the hat to artists like Dona Nelson or even Harvey Quaytman's quadrant-cross compositions.



Birds of a Feather, 68 x 45 in., dye, bleach, oil, graphite, and marble on linen with beveled pine, 2021

This window correlation is not utilized exclusively to draw the viewer to look through at a vista, but rather the painting acts as both window and scenery. Eleanor fuses still life (inside) and landscape (outside) in both the structure of the canvas and the painted subject matter. The stretchers also bear resemblance to the floor plan of a building and to architecture. Coupled with the schema of the perimeters, they take the form of the aerial view of a boat. Important to note here is Eleanor's relationship to water, the ocean, and sailing. She has twice sailed to the Azores from North America and has spent months working and traveling on the ocean. In this way, the window is slightly imprecise. She more precisely is manufacturing a (canvas) sail to *fashion a boat*.

Eleanor has crafted a structure appropriate for an inclusive amalgam. A boat that is a mountain, a shelf, a receptacle, a house. A being unlike the one she is, in order to pour the one she is into it. As Jung interpreted the house in dreams as a metaphor for the psyche, paintings operate in much the same manner. A psyche made in form, for instance. If the subconscious marionettes images and sentiments forward, the painter works consciously but also subconsciously, akin to the psyche. The latter is equally responsible for color, relations, composition, lucid representations, and such. The abstruse qualities of Eleanor's work point to this dream structure of a house amid construction, where her philosophical speculations mix and meld with objects in her milieu: items from specific sites bespeak recent memories, intellectual contradictions fold, art history and novels concoct new spaces for thinking via looking. The psychic ghost holistically proceeding forth through the human, coming toward fruition to dance.

Rubens Ghenov

December 2021

NOTE

1. Etel Adnan, *Of Cities & Women (Letters to Fawwaz)* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1993), 15.



Pell-mell, 65 x 45 in., oil, acrylic, dye, bleach, and graphite on linen with beveled pine and marble, 2021