

EJ Hauser: *Barn Spirits*

by Louis Block

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big blue mountain bed pulls me in. Caught in a web of blue and gray, I find arcades and lintels, flasks and halos, ornaments and wires. Like false tracings, the painting's successive layers form blueprints to be canceled and overwritten. A root system of drooping serifs holds up a vibrating triangle of starlings mid-flight, or tinsel on a fir, or a pyramid's shimmering bricks.

In this show of nine canvases, all painted in 2018, EJ Hauser mines an ever-shifting vocabulary of form. The language here lies somewhere between literal and mythological, spoken and remembered. Working in a barn and field in the Catskills last year, Hauser sought out the “roar of nature.” Looking at the paintings, you get the impression that she carefully catalogued that roar into individual notes. It is out of this dissection of phenomena that the painter's icons emerge, singular and strange.

One of the delightful paradoxes of the paintings is their interplay of fluid and static. Where many painters exploit the viscosity of their medium to mimic nature's incessant shifting, Hauser's

mark-making is jittery and definitive. It gives hope for our binary Anthropocene: it interprets, ruthlessly, and then dissolves.

Pablo Neruda saw ancient hieroglyphs in lichen, a massive map in granite, purple thorns in amethyst.¹ Hauser has a similar penchant for metaphor: blue wing blue starchart is a footprint in the snow and a warped constellation. Its puddles are nebulae and its quick smears glacial tills. *big pink barnspirit* is Neolithic and alien. Blushing beneath its knotted surface, tender pinks and blues and yellows are lens flares or overdone makeup. What a mark pretends to be is just as important as how it's made.

In the primary forest pocket, Hauser repeats the right-hand radial blocks of blue starchart, masked with fungus and vines in organized globs. Blues hop between pthalo and cobalt and ultramarine over a rouged cadmium. What is a forest pocket? A shield, of sorts, where the cabin is our pale blue dot. Our nucleus. The bounds of the forest are where the program fails to render more texture. Our line of sight ends not in distance but in density, where spooky creatures can be chalked up to anti-aliased backgrounds. Entropy encroaches.

Symbols are more soldered than drawn. Revisions are highlighted rather than washed out. Hauser's icons progress with version notes. There is no dust here, only tablets in intimate cuneiform. Forms evolve through tactile repetition—some layers are fishbowl reflections, others false projections. Look at the peaks in summer mountain bed, dancing from mystic sprinkles of quartz to steady garden hose spray.

This lexicon is vulnerable, mercurial. It exists in the back of the throat and in the grayed out memories of the retina. Stargaze at these paintings, read their dregs.