

TWO COATS OF PAINT

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EJ Hauser: Innocence and wonder



Contributed by Sharon Butler /

In her new painting exhibition “Barn Spirits” at Derek Eller, Brooklyn-based artist EJ Hauser features ungainly, diagram-like landscapes with flat, unmodulated color generated by way of a layered process that conjures screen-printing or crayon drawing. The new imagery, presentational rather than transformative, expands the substantially abstract visual language she introduced several years ago with the addition of explicitly rustic representations – “teetering,” as the press release says, “between iconography and something familiar but abstract.” Such a description may make the work sound self-consciously eclectic and perhaps overcrowded, and the paintings certainly are not spare. But in fact, they reflect an integrated concept of harmonization and, especially via color and surface, convey a concentrated vector of vibrant, quietly celebratory energy that may afford the viewer a contemplative moment of joy.

Hauser’s hallmark is quirky brushwork that utilizes a chunky, quasi-staccato, faux-bitmap line. Here she has employed it to draw triangular trees, wood knots, night skies, bird wings, and

other details of nature that she observed working in the Catskills over the summer. The feigned naiveté of the drawing is at least obliquely reminiscent of Philip Guston's late work. Unlike Guston, however, Hauser eschews any unequivocally dark vision, instead presenting a childlike innocence and wonder that may not foreclose doom but, with vestiges of regionalism, leaves the world open to happier endings. If Guston's paintings embodied a kind of informed misery, Hauser's seem qualifiedly optimistic, as if the artist, in her respite from the city, found some hope among the undisturbed – but ever vulnerable – woodland creatures.