

Inner Landscapes

Perhaps the easiest way to approach Laurel Holloman's paintings is to take a step back. The enormous scale of their canvasses that measure up to fourteen by seven feet need a certain distance in order for the viewer to immerse himself in them. Once this happens, the intense, cloudy, abstractly pulsing streams of color condense to what they really are: inner landscapes.

Laurel Holloman stakes a claim with her images that is diametrically opposed to the stringently formal concepts or politically ambitious positions of a major part of contemporary art. Her art deals with nothing less than the origin of life, with the world as a whole and the role of human beings in it, with the chaos of the cosmos into which we are thrown. Laurel Holloman picks up from the almost spiritual approach of the post-war modern movement before conceptual art cut a swath for intellect and rationality. Her paintings are soul mates of the color field paintings of painters such as Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko who sucked the viewer into their paintings in keeping with Immanuel Kant's concept of the „sublime“ as a natural higher power. But in contrast to her predecessors, Holloman's images develop a pull that is full of movement and coincidences.

Her more recent works seem to take their cues from surrealism: Led by the gesture of the unconscious that Max Ernst or Salvador Dalí used in their phantastically conceived images, the color-drenched, open-bordered plains give rise to smaller-scale structures that often seem to be serially arranged as a sort of automatic writing or psychogramme. André Breton, who used a similar method for writing, called this approach to artistic creation in his 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto* a „mental dictation not subordinate to any rational control“. In her undefinable, softly undulating pictorial spaces, Laurel Holloman consciously eliminates any hint of a horizon in order to be able to move freely as if in the starry sky or a body of water that could derive from a sequence in a dream or a childhood memory. Flickering light effects that recall the reflection of the sun on water or storm clouds in the summer sky heighten this impression. But each hinted-at figuration immediately gives way to a higher-level, almost mystical atmosphere – a main source for the intensity of these works.

Subconscious, dream-like, spontaneous impulses appear as Laurel Holloman's essential driving forces. Her pictorial spaces describe shadows and waves, lightning and clouds without concrete depiction of natural phenomena. At the same time, they leave an impression that is clearly derived from Nature. They can be connected to the trance states of the surrealists as well as conjuring up the poetic impulse of German romanticism. The unfiltered access to psychological states is transformed into an orientation on primeval natural events. Laurel Holloman's paintings come into being at the nexus between landscape motifs and emotional qualities. However, the compositional concept of form that is still present in classic romanticism recedes in favor of rhythmic expressivity that does not avail itself of univocal symbols. The guideline is a free concept of the pictorial as it was celebrated towards the close of the modern movement.

What Laurel Holloman adds to this approach is a playful, mysterious component. In this, she is closer to the turn-of-the century symbolism of Odilon Redon or the meditative enchanted worlds of Paul Klee than to the grand gestures of the fully abstract post-war painters. The artist's disinclination towards the darker impulses that are a recurring – or even a principal - theme in surrealism and romanticism elements makes her work not only existentially bearable but actively alluring, not an easy feat given their huge dimensions that would seem to demand stringent control rather than a playfully light touch.

This particularity is especially noteworthy in so far as historically the mastery of monumental formats is mostly the reserve of male painters. From Rembrandt van Rijn's „Nightwatch“ (1642) to Théodore Géricault's „Raft of the Medusa“ (1818/19), from Pablo Picasso's unsettling panorama of war „Guernica“ (1937) to Barnett Newman's abstraction „Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV“ (1969/70) and Anselm Kiefer's apocalyptically crannied landscape „Bohemia by the Sea“ (1995), it was mostly artists using grand gestures and an (art-)historically highly reflective approach that expended their energies on landscape formats. Laurel Holloman's decision for wall-filling canvasses by contrast makes no historicising claims. Clearly, it is motivated purely by the self-confident desire to provide the largest space possible to the force of her emotional expression and, almost as an aside, to present the viewer with mankind's subordinate place in the world, without ever falling into the trap of merely filling the picture plain at random.

In her combination of pictorial principles inspired by romanticism, surrealism and color field painting that are regarded as classic and completely original expression of emotions, Laurel Holloman has created an oeuvre that distances itself from all attempts at facile art historical categorisation. Her paintings are timeless, neither backward-looking nor asserting a renewal of any specific theoretical concept of what painting ought to achieve. Laurel Holloman's paintings, just like their feely associated titles, speak of a forthright avowal of emotion and memory without pushing a pre-defined message on their viewers. Rather, these works allow the viewer to float in their pictorial spaces – or in their own inner landscapes.

Gesine Borchardt