

Douglass Freed interview, May 2017, by Bruno David

Question: For many years you have been known for your large scale multipaneled paintings, Diptych's, and triptych's. In this exhibition, you have not included any of these.

Doug: For the last two years I have been focused on making single panel works. Intentionally scaling down the size of my paintings. This exhibition contains eighteen of these smaller works. The largest of these are 36 x 32 inches and the smallest of them are 20 x 16 inches. I wanted to try making small paintings which I have rarely done in the past. The diptychs and triptychs allowed me to do very large works, eight feet and larger. Emerson Electric here in St Louis owns a triptych which is 9 X 29 feet. These large paintings were about changing time and light that shows one panel of day light and the second panel of evening light. In this body of work each painting is its own time. This series is made up of night fall and morning light paintings with titles designating so. Moving to smaller works has allowed me to create more individual paintings. Of course, it doesn't take nearly the time to do. This has been a freeing exercise in my practice.

Question: For much of your early career you made non-objective paintings. When and why did you start creating landscapes?

Doug: From graduate school throughout the seventies and eighties until 1995 I was known for my elaborately constructed multipaneled painted structures. These were very minimalist works of large fields of color with structured elements. I showed these paintings in galleries in New York City, St. Louis, Chicago, San Francisco, and Kansas City. About 1995 I started to recognize elements suggesting recognizable imagery of clouds, trees, and water in the paintings. I allowed very abstract elements to emerge from the amorphous fields. For the first time, my work became about landscape and continues to be so ever since. I think the first half of my career as an abstract artist infused my landscapes which are abstractions of the seen world.

Question: What are your sources?

I use photographs I have taken on various travels as my principle sources. My paintings have little to do with trying to capture the shots but use them for color reference and structure. My paintings are quiet, intuitive and to a great extent, about my process. I begin the paintings by working very loosely to establish color and composition. At this stage, the paintings look very impressionist. After covering the canvas with a mediated paint body establishing color areas and structure with landscape composition I then use large six-inch-wide brushes dragging the paint in horizontal and vertical directions across the surface of the whole canvas, in so doing, destroying the impressionist surface, making it a more monolithic, simplified, unified blend of the heavily mediated paint. Then, I spend time recreating the imagery of the painting. This process gives me the softly modeled meditative spiritual melancholy I am striving for.