



The Enigmatic Beauty of Painting

A conversation with Isca Greenfield-Sanders

By Anastasija Jevtovic



Isca Greenfield-Sanders solo exhibition at Miles McEnery Gallery, New York (May 21 - July 11, 2020)
Image courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, NY

On the occasion of her new exhibition *Shade My Eyes*, I spoke to Isca Greenfield-Sanders about her newest body of work which will be on view at Miles McEnery Gallery from 21 May until 11 July 2020. The delicately balanced paintings depict scenes that feel reminiscent of childhood memory. They are distant yet quietly composed, serene and tranquil. We spoke together about her process and upbringing for eazel magazine.

To begin with, where did you spend your childhood?

I grew up in the East Village and I come from a family of artists. My grandfather is the Abstract Expressionist painter, Joop Sanders, and my father is the photographer and filmmaker Timothy Greenfield-Sanders. Knowing from a young age that I was interested in art, I began studying painting and drawing with my grandfather. By 10, my father had taught me to shoot, develop and print my own photographs in his darkroom. I also lived with my parent's collection

of contemporary art, and their enormous library of books on art and artists.

When did you know that you would become an artist?

From the time I was in middle school, I was committed to making things, particularly watercolors. As a young person, I was also very fond of mathematics, which led me to Brown University where I double majored in Math and Painting. I started exhibiting my work during my senior year of college, and math sort of fell away.

Could you please tell us a little more about your upcoming solo exhibition?

My show features landscape paintings in oil and watercolor. There are beach paintings, cloud paintings, aerial views. There is wild landscape and manicured landscape. There are paintings with and without the figure. I took a broad approach in assembling the images for this show. The title is "Shade my Eyes" which is a lyric fragment from the Pink Floyd song "Green is the Color." My paintings are all based on and influenced by amateur shot 35mm slides from the 1950s and 1960s. I started making this work in the late 1990s when digital technologies were taking hold and effectively put an end to film photography. My early embrace of digital editing software, pigment printing, and high resolution scanning guided the direction my work took.

Can you take us through your process?

I start by making a digital composition in photoshop that combines elements from a few different photographs. I may take the figures from one photo and place them in a landscape from a second. At a minimum, I am cropping the photo and removing elements to streamline the image. Next I make a study of the photographic composition using watercolor and color pencil. That study is scanned and enlarged in the computer. The enlarged study is printed, in a grid of squares, and then glued to the canvas and sealed so that I may paint directly on it. The final layer is oil paint.

What inspired you to work with your materials?

I use found photography as a starting point for my work because I like to react to information that is randomly generated. I buy large lots of photos at auction, sorting through them very quickly, allowing myself to be grabbed by an image. Because I have no personal attachment to the person who shot the photo, or to the location or subject - I am able to use the information as data - and build paintings that rely heavily on color and memory.

Paper is very important to me and figures heavily in my work. All of my watercolor studies, line drawings and oil paintings are made on paper. I use a machine made mulberry paper that is smooth on one side and rough on the other. For the oil paintings I glue the paper to canvas and seal it so it can take oil. That produces a smooth surface that is quite different from painting on the mechanical weave of a canvas.

Watercolor was my first love and has always been part of my practice. I use it in combination with color pencil, which forms a resist to the watercolor. By working this way, I can select parts of the composition to enhance and

finely detail in pencil, while allowing other parts of the composition to dissolve in the watercolor.

My use of oil is inspired by my study of watercolor. I use a lot of translucent color so that you can see through to the layers of watercolor and photography that form the under paintings in all of my oils.

Your work seems to explore calmness and refinement of line and color. Could you please explain how the watercolors and oil paintings relate to one another?

In general, the way that I make the paintings is very additive. I am adding photography to watercolor to oil painting, and that includes a lot of layering. I have always sought to balance that out by pairing down the colors that I use, limiting the palette to four or five colors. A close inspection of any of my paintings will reveal the final oil is painted using very few colors. The watercolors are made first and are referenced in reproduction beneath the oil paintings. However, I consider the watercolors independent unique works unto themselves.

How do you think today's landscape has changed and how has it affected your work?

My work is not based on today's landscape, so in that sense any changes do not affect my work. However, in my opinion, landscape painting has increasingly more relevance as we begin to reconnect with how climate change alters our physical world.

Tell us about when you see people looking at your work.

Because my work is photographically based, it has a certain accuracy to it, and the viewer has immediate access to my paintings, they can suspend their disbelief. Typically, the longer you look at a conventionally made painting the more you notice about it and the more you understand. However, with my work, the more you look, the more you question what you initially understood. You may notice there is a paper beneath the paint. Perhaps you see the difference in paint at the margin edge of the canvas. Certain elements may feel like watercolor, others like oil paint. I find the layering of mediums and the physical layering of paints, glue, paper and prints pull apart the notion of what is understood.

What do you want people to walk away with?

As an artist I think my job is to collect things that are interesting and present them to the world in a beautiful way. To shape a point of view. I have always wanted to paint, I love to do it. My work deals with how photography conditions memory, and how images become touchstones for experience.

A presentation of new paintings by Isca Greenfield-Sanders is currently on view at Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, NY (525 West 22nd Street, May 21 - July 11, 2020). The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication featuring an essay by Kris Paulsen.

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