

ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

JAMES SIENA

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After spending 18 winters in the Berkshires, painter James Siena has honed a rhythm of working between Massachusetts and Brooklyn. The demands of maintaining a historic brick federal house, to which his barn studio is attached, often times occupies as much time as weathering the urban chaos. “Even as an artist whose paintings demand a great amount of time, I like having my work and life integrated—between moving my garden in Otis and hearing the cars honk in the city,” he told Art New England. “I savor the act of painting.”

Siena’s hallucinatory paintings are the foremost witnesses to time and process. Completed in two or three months, his matte acrylic abstractions in his new exhibition at Miles McEnery Gallery are absorbent—of time, labor, and energy—encapsulating both the flow and stillness of time.

Siena’s first exhibition with the Chelsea gallery features his recent experiments on the life of a line. Not necessarily linear or annular, rather waves and turbulences narrate continuums of potential. Gravity or physics of our universe serve little to rationalize the liquids and solids in *Chloasmia* (2022) or *Trectiuff* (2020). A viridian-heavy vortex in the former alternates to a ruby density in the latter—both wavy and kinetic in the most earthly description. They are rather combative tranquilities, currents of Siena’s hand gestures at his rain-reverberating metal-roofed New England barn or his loft studio in Brooklyn’s industrial Bed-Stuy neighborhood. “The cerebral realm of physics, mathematics and logic as well as emergence,” Siena explains the basis of his paintings.

The artist occasionally finds himself swimming in the Hayes Pond on the northwest of his Berkshires dwelling, where he lives with his collection of works by other artists, or painting to the sounds of the New York City jam—yet, either way, echoes populate Siena’s linen surfaces. They burst through the plane field, challenging the framed borders of materiality. The artist’s departure from enamel surfaces a few years ago lets him start with what he calls “a milky translucent” layer of gesso. “Closer or distant views show different sights of the paintings as they explore how cascades of evolving forms shape on pictorial plane.”

— Osman Can Yerebakan