
Hannah K Freeman: Inside the Artist's Studio

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Hannah K Freeman's *Harmony* will be on display in the Saville Gallery of the Allegany Arts Council February 6-27, 2021. A digital gallery will be available on our [website](#) . We spoke to Hannah about the inspiration, techniques, and creative evolution that helped shape the show.

Q. You have said that the world of lichens, fungi, and mosses serve as the starting point for the paintings in this exhibition. Can you talk a little bit about where you go looking for inspiration and how the journey of creating a painting unfolds for you once you begin?

A. All of my work stems from my daily experiences connecting with the natural world – through walks, hikes, or just taking time to notice little moments around me while going about my day. I've always been drawn to little organisms, but once I started researching what they were and what they do for us in the world, I was completely hooked. It's mind-blowing how connected we all are.

The majority of the paintings in this exhibition are inspired by my encounters with lichens, fungi, and mosses while hiking through woods up in Alaska. When I see these tiny organisms, I feel ecstatic, like I'm suddenly in some dreamy, magical fairyland. Through painting, I want to capture both the organism and the experience that I went through as I examined it, thinking beyond the particular; thus, in my paintings,



realistic elements blend into abstract forms and colors. I always have a plan of action for each work (with detailed sketches, notes, and photographic references), but usually when I begin painting, that plan quickly gets cast aside because the painting begins to take on another story that's better than my plan.

Q. How do techniques from landscape painting and abstraction intersect and combine in your work?

A. From a technical standpoint, in my paintings, I combine representational elements from the landscape with abstract forms and colors. Elements that feel familiar dissolve into areas that are foreign and mysterious. The familiar can pull viewers in, and the unfamiliar can lead viewers to think beyond the particular, to begin to reflect upon their own thoughts and feelings.



From a conceptual standpoint, I draw upon the history of landscape painting and abstraction, which are both rooted in humanity's tangled relationship with the environment and spirituality. I feel a deep spiritual connection with the landscape, and, through abstraction, I can begin to visually communicate that relationship.

Q. Nature plays such a fundamental role in your paintings. Is it your hope that viewers come away from this show with a sense of the importance of preserving the natural world?



A. Not necessarily. I think that if my work inspires viewers to look at the landscape more carefully in general, or to think about their relationship to it in a new way, then I've done the job I've set out to do. If not, that's okay, too – maybe my work can plant the seed that might spring up later on in the viewer's life.

My own views are that we need to be stewards of the landscape – work with the natural world. Observe it. Listen to it. Then act.

Q. Your work typically is installed in a way that feels as organic as the paintings themselves. What guides the suggestions you give about how to hang the exhibition to the galleries doing your installations?

A. The installations go back to my experiences out in the natural world, surrounded by the connections between magical little organisms. When designing

installations, I also think about the viewer's potential experience within the space of the gallery, and the relationship of my work to the viewer as they move through the space. In my installation for this show, the arrangements of the paintings reference the cyclical nature of our earth, as well as the underlying interconnectivity and harmony of existence.



Q. How has your work evolved and how do you see it continuing to change moving forward?



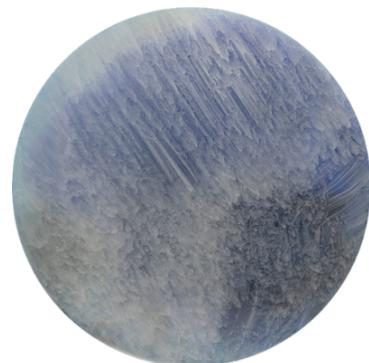
A. When I began painting, I painted from direct observation, from still lifes that I set up to communicate the relationship between humans and the natural world. After a few years of that, my conceptual interests (of capturing my interior feelings and emotions in relation to the landscape) led my work down a path that became more abstract.

Currently, I love starting with abstraction, and then working back into that with more representational elements, all of which are based on things that I actually encounter in the world. Working abstractly is very freeing, and I never know what the end product is going to look like, which is always exciting and motivating (with still life painting, I always knew what the end product would look like – pretty much, anyway – I just had to paint it).

Moving forward, conceptually, my work will probably continue to always be rooted in my spiritual experiences in the natural world. Due to this, I'll probably also continue working with abstraction. That being said, I am starting to feel my background in graphic design come through more in my paintings. I feel like I have a natural tendency now to incorporate more graphic and symbolic elements, like seen in *Harmony*. I'm looking forward to seeing where this goes in the future.

Q. Is there anything else you would like people to know about you, your process, or your work?

A. There is no “right way” to look at these paintings. Abstraction can be challenging to absorb and to process – and that is okay! That is exactly the point of abstraction. The more time you spend with it, the more it rewards you. So – sit with my paintings (or the images online), meditate on them, and see where they take you –





Meet the Artist at the Saville Gallery

Hannah Freeman will be available in the Saville Gallery on **Saturday, February 27, 2021**, the final day of her show, from **2:00PM-4:00PM**. There is no need to register in advance; just drop in and spend a few moments talking with Hannah and learning more about her work. **Due to the ongoing restrictions related to COVID-19, all guests will be required to wear a mask, socially distance and observe proper protocols.*



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