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A Thousand Echoes in My Mind
December 8 – January 31

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Sono Osato

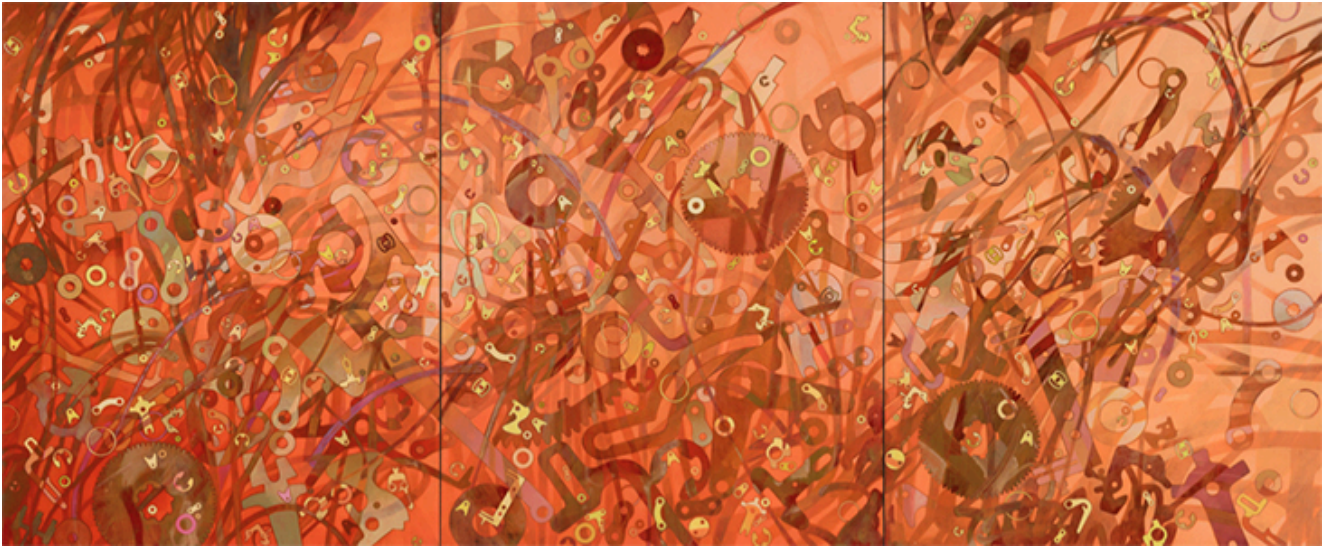
“Evolution of an Idea: Diluvia to Midden”

Paul Thiebaud Gallery - San Francisco, California

by Mark Van Proyen

December 15, 2025

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Sono Osato, "Diluvia 1," 2021, tinted rabbit-skin glue ground and oil on panel, triptych, 30 x 72". All images courtesy of Paul Thiebaud Gallery, San Francisco.

Continuing through January 10, 2026

The dozen paintings on panel and watercolors on paper that comprise Sono Osato's current exhibition reminded me of a diary entry penned by Franz Kafka: "The clocks are not in unison; the inner one runs crazily on at a devilish or demoniac or in any case inhuman pace, the outer one limps along at its usual speed." Indeed, there is something amiss in these modestly scaled images of floating clock parts. There is also more than meets the eye here, having to do with the elusive balance between conjunction and disjunction.



Sono Osato, "Midden 1," 2025, oil on clayboard, 16 x 16".

These paintings depict cogs, sprockets, gears and flywheels in various ways, along with other small machine parts. All these clock parts are pictured as floating in their respective picture-spaces, seeming to occupy a zero-gravity environment, in some cases accidentally colliding with each other, in others seeming to pair and bond as if they were magnets. Almost all are illuminated from behind, making them look a bit like colorized X-ray photographs presented in layers of translucent hue.

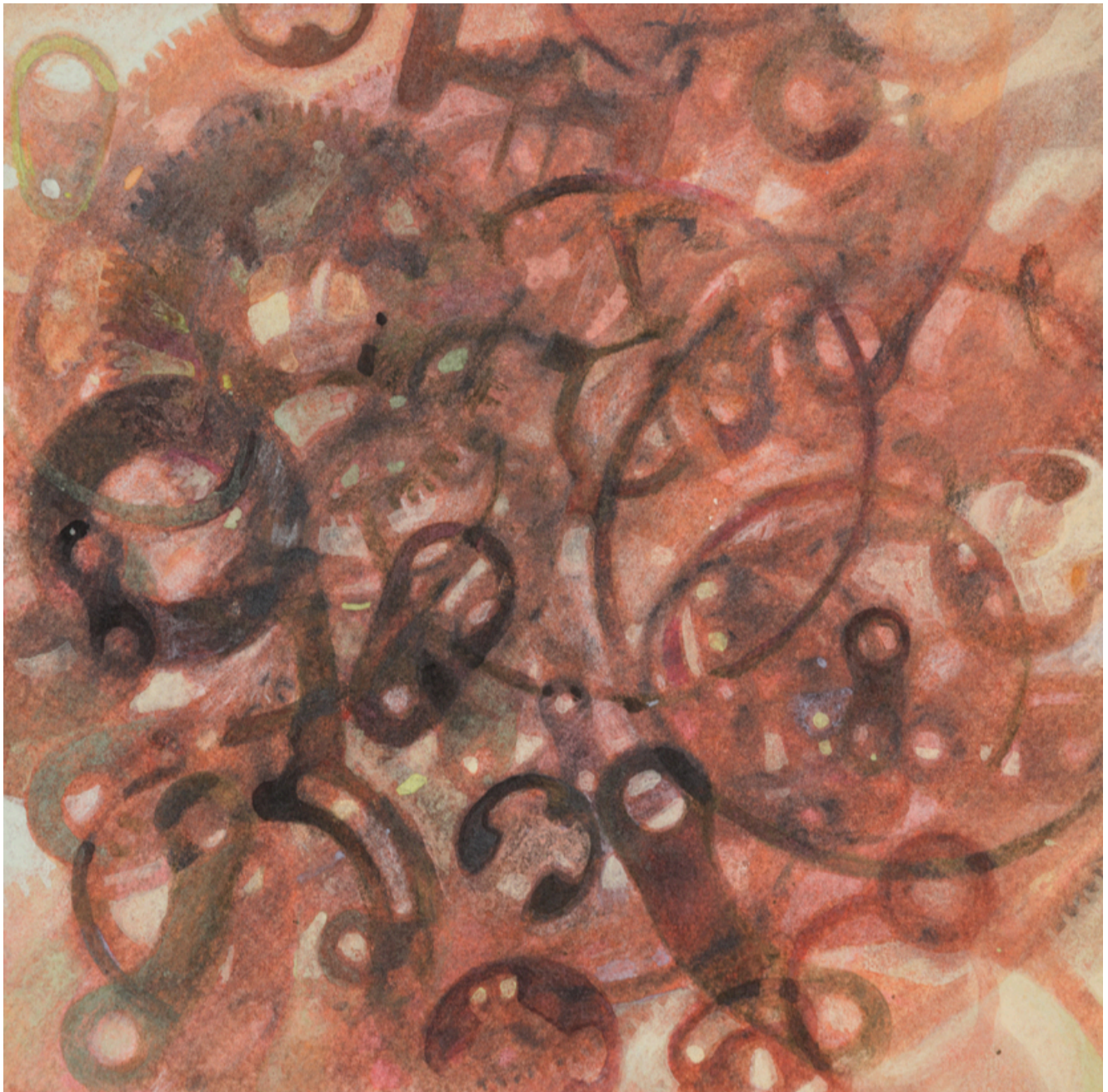
"Diluvia" is a geological term that refers to a glacial drift in a tundra landscape, exemplifying the inexorable slowness of geological time. A "Midden" is a heap of archeological objects that document socioecological relationships and human–environmental interactions over that time. These prompts allow us to see Osato's works as imaginary archaeologies of a soon-to-be-bygone material culture captured and persevered in aesthetic amber. Seen as memorials to the collapse and decay of Newtonian orderliness, the artist counters the multi-perspective velocities of post-Newtonian metaphysics. His paintings also speed up the sense of an orderly world slowly dissolving over time, aligning them with the motion capture paintings of the Italian Futurists.



Sono Osato, "Diluvia 7," 2025, tinted rabbit-skin glue ground and oil on panel, 36 x 36".

Although Osato's paintings are thematically unified, they vary dramatically in tone and execution. The three-panel "Diluvia #1" (2021) presents a cascade of mechanical forms flowing from panel to panel, rendered in various shades of yellow ochre set against a bright yellow background. The transitions between the specified foreground and the energized background are subtle and cheerful. Other works are more elegiac in tone, using a wider spectrum of autumnal colors and clear, decisive outlines. The tooth-edged ovals of "Midden #1" (2025) coalesce against a light blue picture space. The ovals are of different sizes and painted in a color range running from purple to dark red to orange.

Sometimes, other materials enter the mix. For example, in “Diluvia #7 (2025), Osato uses subtle chromatic tints in her rabbit-skin glue primer, with which she builds up layers of shapes with varying levels of contrast. The use of red oxide and dark purple brings to mind Charles Demuth’s “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold” (1928), suggesting that Osato identifies with the aesthetic aims of the American Precisionist movement. However, instead of celebrating the culture of industrial streamlining, her works intimate the unwinding and slow collapse of that very culture.



Sono Osato, “Midden 10,” 2025, graphite, watercolor, and gouache on Stonehenge paper, 8 x 8”.

A few of the works on paper also display unusual techniques such as mixing dry pigment and graphite with gouache and watercolor. This creates a dreamy, effervescent effect that

shrouds the discernible shapes into a smoky cloud of indistinction. These works are charming and seductive when viewed alongside the panels, as one might expect from their smaller size. The smallest is particularly seductive. Titled “Midden #10” (2015), it is a swirling composition that telescopes diagonally into a deep, amorphous space.

Osato’s paintings can be taken as meditations on the operations of time, now conceived in light of our understanding of quantum mechanics. They point to a kind of quantum history, in which reality is in flux and inherently incomplete, meaning that events can retroactively reshape the past from which they emerge. Deep stuff indeed. Tip of the hat to William Butler Yeats’ “Second Coming” for the insight.

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