

Gothic Light

"The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material. And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion." Abbot Suger describing a Gothic cathedral, 12th century

Janise Yntema's painting explores physical light as a manifestation of emotional and psychological states, states of human frailty and the soul's expansion into hope. Through the materials of melted wax on wood panel, her paintings capture and emanate light toward a transcendent feeling of tranquility, order, and purity.

Yntema creates a transcendent lightness through her materials and techniques. She applies natural bees wax to wood panels, shaping it with heat. This method of encaustic is one of the oldest known painting techniques dating back to over 2000 years, and is so durable that ancient Egyptian encaustic paintings still maintain their brilliant colors and minute detail, never cracking like oil painting, and being unaffected by moisture, mildew, or fungus. The intensity of time in such a technique draws the artist's close attention to the process itself: slow, meditative, almost prayer-like. And the extreme heat involved recalls alchemy, the changing of mundane materials into precious sacred objects. Yntema uses a blow torch to sweep her "brush strokes" across her paintings seamlessly, while the heat invisibly dilutes, mixes, and binds the layers of color to each other into translucent layers of luminous tone. She then polishes the surfaces with the softest cotton to a high fleshy gloss, like oil rubbed into supple skin.

Yntema further develops the radiant feeling light emanating from the materials by carefully choosing her colors and surface texture. Yntema's color, creating silence and simplicity, is the melting sky, the sunrise and the sunset through water, given in blues, greens, yellows, pinks, violets, and browns. Overlaid together, they continually swirl and drift. She depicts sky, undifferentiated particles of atmosphere, opening spaces that seem to breathe. And yet, the sky and water are only suggested and the paintings preserve the silence of being non-representative, nebulous, and imaginatively expansive. Of the surface texture, the polished finish seems matt when viewed frontally, but when moving to the side view it becomes shiny, glossy in patches, shimmering with a gently undulating surface. It is the surface of still waters, a glassy reflective, catching the ambient light and gathering it into bright patches. And yet earth-bound, the gouges in the surfaces puncture the flesh-like surface, pinching, puckering, and folding at the incision location. Opposites in harmony, the transcendent light is manifest by a material so bodily, tactile, lickable, supple, pliant, in fatty veins of white, bleeding and frenetic at times like lightning. The strong push and pull between the fleshy surface and airy depth brings life to the already organic wax and wood materials.

In scale, some of Yntema's paintings are almost large enough to walk right through, full of air and light, and other paintings are small like peepholes into an unimaginably vast space beyond. In this way, the sizes are inviting on a personal level. Yntema explains: "I am interested in finding a balance of exactly how much is necessary to fully develop a painting, and exactly how much is necessary to leave out."

—Jaquelyn Tuerk, Phd, Professor of Art History, Kean University, September 2009