

THE RICHLY LAYERED, albescent grounds of Léonie Guyer's most recent paintings are inspired, in part, by the creamy surfaces of ancient Greek white-ground vessels, by the work of painters such as Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) and Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), and by natural materials such as milk, bone, and chalk. Guyer mixes her paints by hand from raw pigments, often restricting her palette to the “ancient” primary colors (iron oxides, yellow ochres, and mineral-based blues), in addition to various blacks and whites. This alchemical chromaticism allows Guyer to experience the physical and energetic properties of each material as directly and as sensitively as possible. Hand-mixing paint is an intimate, time-consuming, and repetitive activity, resulting in modest batches that settle and cohere in accordance with the subtle variations of each particular admixture of pigment, linseed oil, and mineral spirit. No two batches are the same, recalling the ancient philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus's observation that “You cannot step twice into the same river.” At the core of Guyer's paintings and drawings is an awareness and embrace of life as a vulnerable and temporary moment within a measureless, universal continuum.

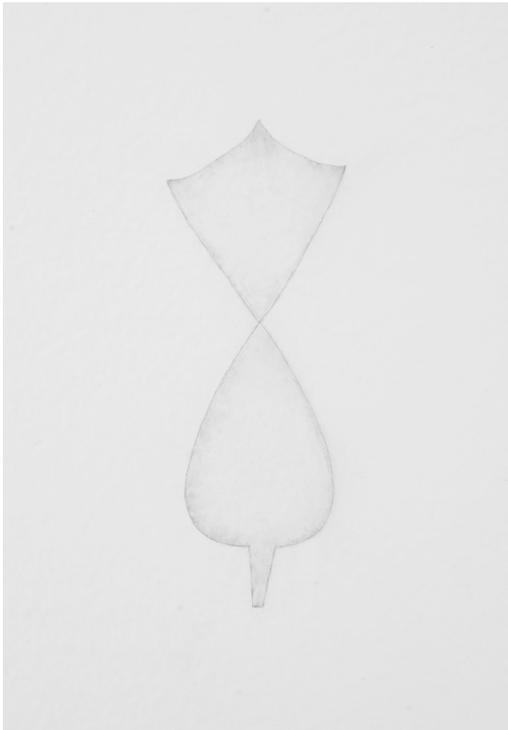
When one gazes at the paintings from an oblique angle, soft, energized topographies bleed into focus. Smooth and dappled, they bear witness to the body of the artist, having grown into being like other living membranes such as human skin and fallen snow. Guyer creates the space and conditions for materials to ease into coexistence, while releasing control over any ultimate outcome, focusing her intention on the emergence of the materials into meaning with an iconic energy that is resonantly clear but also deeply idiosyncratic. The ethos of the work dwells in the possibility and reciprocity of intimacy. Pursuing this encounter, the work solicits – not demands – intimacy in return, and a quieting of the viewer’s mind toward the integrity of the present moment. The possibility of spiritual recognition is catalyzed in this possibility, *qua* presence, continually emptying and renewing itself: in the flow of the viewer’s attention and its divergence, in the flow of the painting’s life as an extension of the artist’s body and mind, and in the flow of the ancient matter – ground and suspended – that forms the work. The velocity of this flow swells and shifts around the vivid, simple, and unusual shapes that are situated within each painting’s expansive environment.

Guyer develops the abstracted shapes that become the dynamic foci of the paintings in relationship to an archive of her own drawings, but ultimately, each unique form reaches fruition according to its own nature, as the painting evolves over many months. The shapes are inspired, in part, by objects and artifacts such as Cycladic figures (6500 to 1650 BCE) and antique Turkish prayer rugs (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries). Each one harnesses a unique simplicity and energy within the

expansive whiteness of the painting, and each one possesses a pulsing interiority. As forms, they are not *filled* but *forming* – their intensity, not without humor and lyricism, can feel at times like a flash of insight or an oasis of repose – another dimension of the flow of *being and becoming* at the heart of Guyer’s work.

For the past several years, Guyer has drawn on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century papers, mostly of French and Indian origin, that possess rich and eccentric traces of their histories. These traces are integral to Guyer’s interest in the paper, and to her personal drawing methodology, which is based on her responsiveness to the nature of individual materials and their unique properties. Working on these richly storied sheets, Guyer explores the nature of visibility and invisibility, soliciting close, focused attention from the viewer. At times it is nearly impossible to discern what is *drawn* and what is *already present* within the delicate sheets, as the space of the page is transformed into an engrossing field of heightened awareness. Guyer often uses graphite over colored pencil, to create vibrating lines that contain, but do not fill, the shapes that they demarcate. Periodically, Guyer paints on paper using gouache. The gouache is carefully brushed and layered to create the same intimate, intensified forms.

Over the past twenty years, Guyer has created a group of temporary and permanent installations that have allowed her to bring the same artistic philosophy and practice into architectural space. In 2006, she was an artist in residence at the historic 1829 Mount Lebanon Shaker Village in New Lebanon, New York. Living and working among the buildings and artifacts of one of America’s most significant religious and artistic movements, Guyer developed a body of painted shapes on the crumbling walls of the old Brethren’s Workshop. For ABSTRACT, Guyer created a delicate wall painting near her work in the gallery. Slightly hidden from view, it brought her presence into direct contact with the viewer’s body, bringing the space of the Cooley Gallery into the continuum of her other site-responsive installations. In all aspects of Guyer’s work, the act of making is a synchronous exploration of past and present, catalyzing the viewer’s awareness of time, space, and presence.



ABOVE: Installation view: Léonie Guyer, paintings  
LEFT: Léonie Guyer, *Untitled*, 2010, Graphite pencil and oil on gallery wall, 4 1/4 x 1 1/2 in.