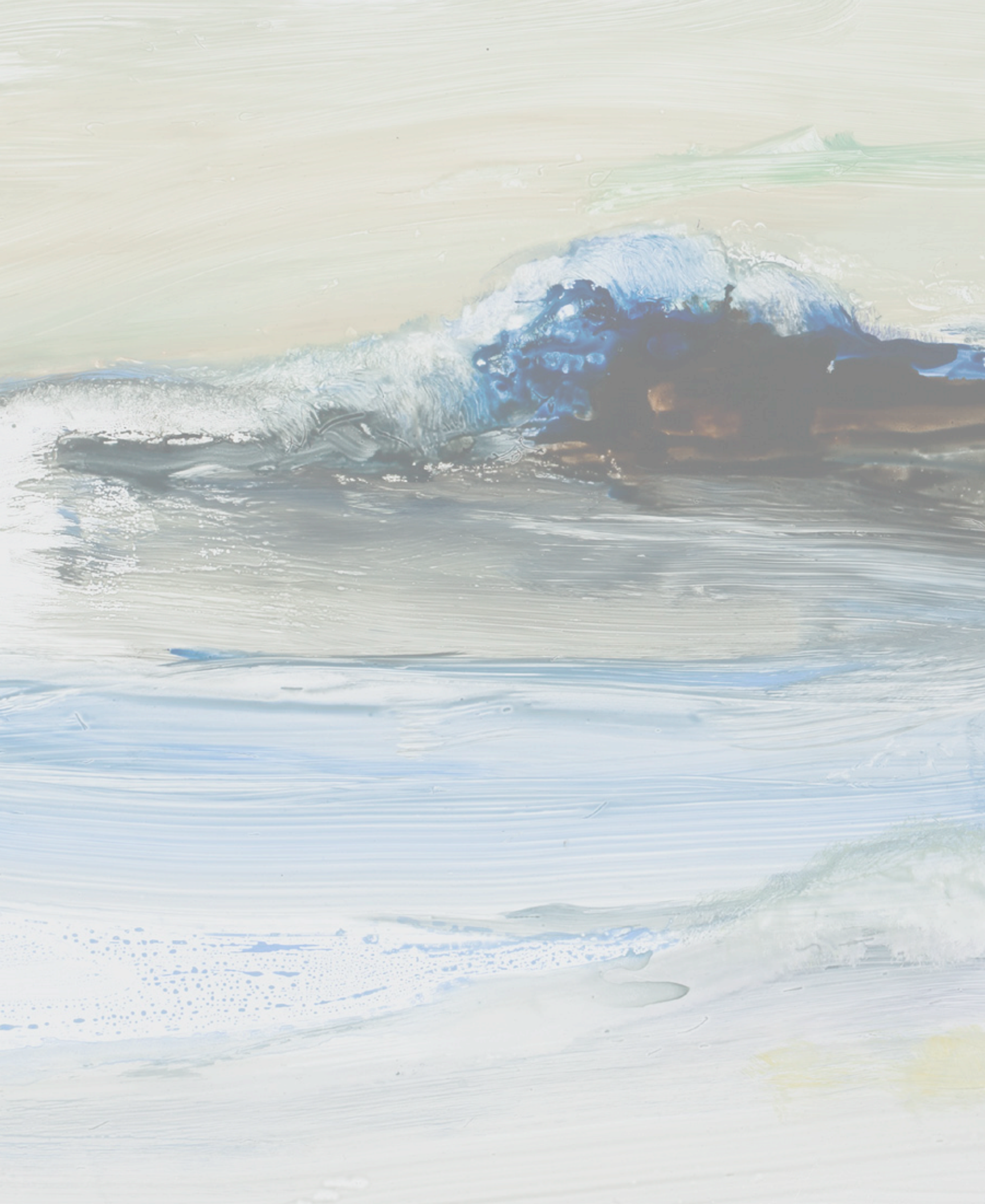


ILANA MANOLSON













1 *Successor*





ILANA MANOLSON



ILANA MANOLSON  
SUM OF

ESSAY BY  
Stephanie Buhmann

JASON MCCOY GALLERY  
NEW YORK



## Ilana Manolson: Sum of

by Stephanie Buhmann

A botanist and former naturalist for Parks Canada, Ilana Manolson walks through nature on nearly a daily basis. While she used to paint directly from life for years, her recent works are primarily made from recollection. They aim to merge and connect many miles of disparate stretches of landscape, fusing a variety of impressions into a singular image. Skillfully layered, Manolson's subjects range from views of epic expanse to close studies of nature's intricate details. Many of these she observes by revisiting particular places repeatedly, making the passing of time a central notion of her work and with that the fragility of existence.

It is due to the fact that her compositions are made from memory that another aspect gains importance: subjectivity. In the studio, Manolson edits her experiences and combines glimpses of her visual recollections with her knowledge of the topic. Free to associate and elaborate, she collages information. By the time she makes her first mark, the collected images have become detached from their original context. In a sense, they have been liberated from exact locations or seasonal specifications. Stripped of such concrete indicators, they appear timeless and become iconic representations of nature. These paintings are not about an individual place but rather about the idea of one.

In many of Manolson's paintings, sizable swatches of the original landscape might be missing, while other details take on an exaggerated role. In *Edited Remembering*, it is the rushing water that appears as nearly a wash of plain white while a stone and its shadow are carefully rendered with fine detail. In addition, some compositions, such as *Sum of* and *Link*, obviously tie together observations made in different places, from varying perspectives, and perhaps over different periods of time. Nevertheless, every detail remains connected, even leaning on each other in an intricate web of forms, patterns and movements. In Manolson, we find this interdependency of the elements unfolding gradually: new growth slows down the flow of water, which creates more sediment and as a result diverts the stream. This allows for light to hit a new area while also depositing a wash of new soil along the shore, setting the stage for smaller details. Upon closer inspection, one might discover rotting leaves curling on the ground or



milkweed seeds bursting out of their pods, while rain pools up in the lush beds of moss nearby. Though sparked by reality, Manolson's layered scenes are fictitious. They are about an interior response to scenery, relating in approach to Edward Hopper's statement of 1959: "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature."<sup>1</sup> While identifiable in their fragments, Manolson's compositions become abstractions when considered in their entirety. These landscapes only exist in the artist's imagination and yet, the viewer will access them as something manifest and familiar.

Overall, Manolson's long practice of translating her experience of nature into invented landscapes firmly roots her oeuvre in the 19th Century tradition of Romanticism when landscape took center stage and became a reflection of emotional and spiritual concepts. In the early 1800s, the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) remarked: "The artist should not only paint what he sees before him, but also what he sees within himself."<sup>2</sup> To Friedrich, and many artists of his generation, nature offered both the experience of and a portal to the sublime. As a result, death in the form of leafless trees in winter, glaciers, rough seas, or flocks of crows became a significant and constant component. Suddenly, nature was not only something to be respected and admired, but something that could reflect the human experience. In addition, its details were able to make up a language of symbols. A similar notion can be found much later in the work of the Danish painter and poet Per Kirkeby, whose abstractions are rooted in nature's patterns. To Kirkeby, "landscapes are about beauty and death. The only way you can define beauty . . . is to know that death is hiding behind it. This is what haunts you when you're doing a so-called landscape painting."<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments are also echoed in Manolson's work, which is rich in contrasts. In many paintings, including *Source*, one of her darkest compositions, various elements of nature are depicted both at their height and the precipice of decay. Despite representing alternating and even opposing states, all components still co-exist harmoniously; together they engage in the infinite rhythm of life on Earth. In fact, it is through the embrace of mortality that Manolson succeeds in embedding a sense of urgency in her compositions. Even though rendered in paint, her images appear somewhat fragile if not temporary. The bodies of water depicted in *Flotsam and Jetsam* or *Noah*, for example, consciously remain beyond grasp; Manolson makes us aware that these are frozen

moments in time, which would be rapidly and endlessly transforming outside of the picture frame. In his *Nature: Aphorisms*, Goethe described it as follows: “The spectacle of Nature is always new, for she is always renewing the spectators. Life is her most exquisite invention; and death is her expert contrivance to get plenty of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite its contextual ties to the past, Manolson’s work also relates to contemporary life. In fact, her focus on bringing together a multitude of experiences and visuals in one plane reflects today’s approach to image making and viewing. Without the use of digital technology, Manolson still offers us the possibility of zooming in and out of information, focusing on the abstract movement of a creek and the remarkable detail of a single stalk of grass at the same time. Meanwhile, by working on aluminum panels and sheets of mounted Yupo paper, Manolson favors supports whose slickness can easily relate to today’s flat screens. Her paint is not absorbed by her surfaces, but rather perches on top. This assures an overall sense of fluidity. In *Medulla*, *Successor*, and *La La Lily*, washes of paint evoke incessant movement, revealing that each detail is in flux. In each of these examples, drips run vertically down most of the composition, veiling it through multiple lines of pigmented water. It is the result of a particular technique, as well as an aesthetic choice, hinting at nature’s infinite transformation, which can occur slowly or forcefully. In fact, by revisiting the same places repeatedly over time, Manolson pays particular attention to how the patterns in landscape shift and evolve. Her works aim to capture this succession of events due to shifting wind formations, temperature, and seasonal changes, among others. To render this sentiment of infinite transitions, her compositions vividly contrast moments of density with calming negative space. In some of Manolson’s works these observations are arranged vertically, stacking and folding information against stark white backgrounds. *Folding of a Season* and *Fall Purse* belong to a particular body of work in which crisp fragmentation provides the final image with a sense of iconic stature.

Manolson’s own experience and the one she offers her audience manifests as the sum of many parts. Collecting them within the confines of the picture frame, she succeeds in creating a pause; while in nature, these multi-faceted scenes would require the observation from various perspectives, places and times. However, in Manolson, they unfold unanimously, as well as independently from such concerns. In this context, color becomes a unifying device. Though she measures the temperature of her palette



from the landscape, she also takes liberties in order to describe, push, and pull space. Most of her works evenly balance warm earth tones with cooler shades of blue. In *Mercurial*, the neutral grey mass of an abstract cloud hovers above the landscape, which translates as a dynamic blend of earth, water, and flora. In *Counting*, color is employed less dramatically but with similar intent. Here, warm and cold hues become interwoven and form a dense tapestry. Through the circular forms on the water's surface we can gather that this is a study of rain, each drop hitting and rippling the surface. This subject relates well to a quote by David Hockney, whose landscape paintings remain a constant subject within his complex oeuvre: "I can get excitement watching rain on a puddle. And then I paint it. Now, I admit, there are not too many people who would find that exciting. But I would. And I want life thrilling and rich."<sup>5</sup>

Though Manolson does not work in series, she does focus on several subjects repeatedly. As a result, her oeuvre consists of groups of studies, depicting streams running through a meadow, swamps, waterscapes, and stacks of plant matter contrasted against plain backgrounds, among others. To her, these themes have proven inexhaustible and a statement comes to mind that was given by the great watercolorist and landscape artist Charles Burchfield, during the last decade of his life: ". . . I'd like to have at least another lifetime like I've had to say what I want to say about nature. I just don't think I can ever get it said. There just isn't time."<sup>6</sup>

- 1 Oral history interview with Edward Hopper conducted by John D. Morse, June 17, 1959, Smithsonian Archives of American Art
- 2 Caspar David Friedrich, cited in: Vaughan, William, *German Romantic Painting*, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 68
- 3 Posner, Helaine, *Per Kirkeby: Paintings and Drawings*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992
- 4 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Nature: Aphorisms*, translated by Thomas Huxley, *A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Science*, November 4, 1869, p. 9
- 5 Interview with David Hockney, conducted by Marion Finlay, FOREST Online, July 28, 2004
- 6 Oral history interview with Charles Burchfield conducted by John D. Morse at the artist's home in West Seneca, NY, August 19, 1959, Smithsonian Archives of American Art

























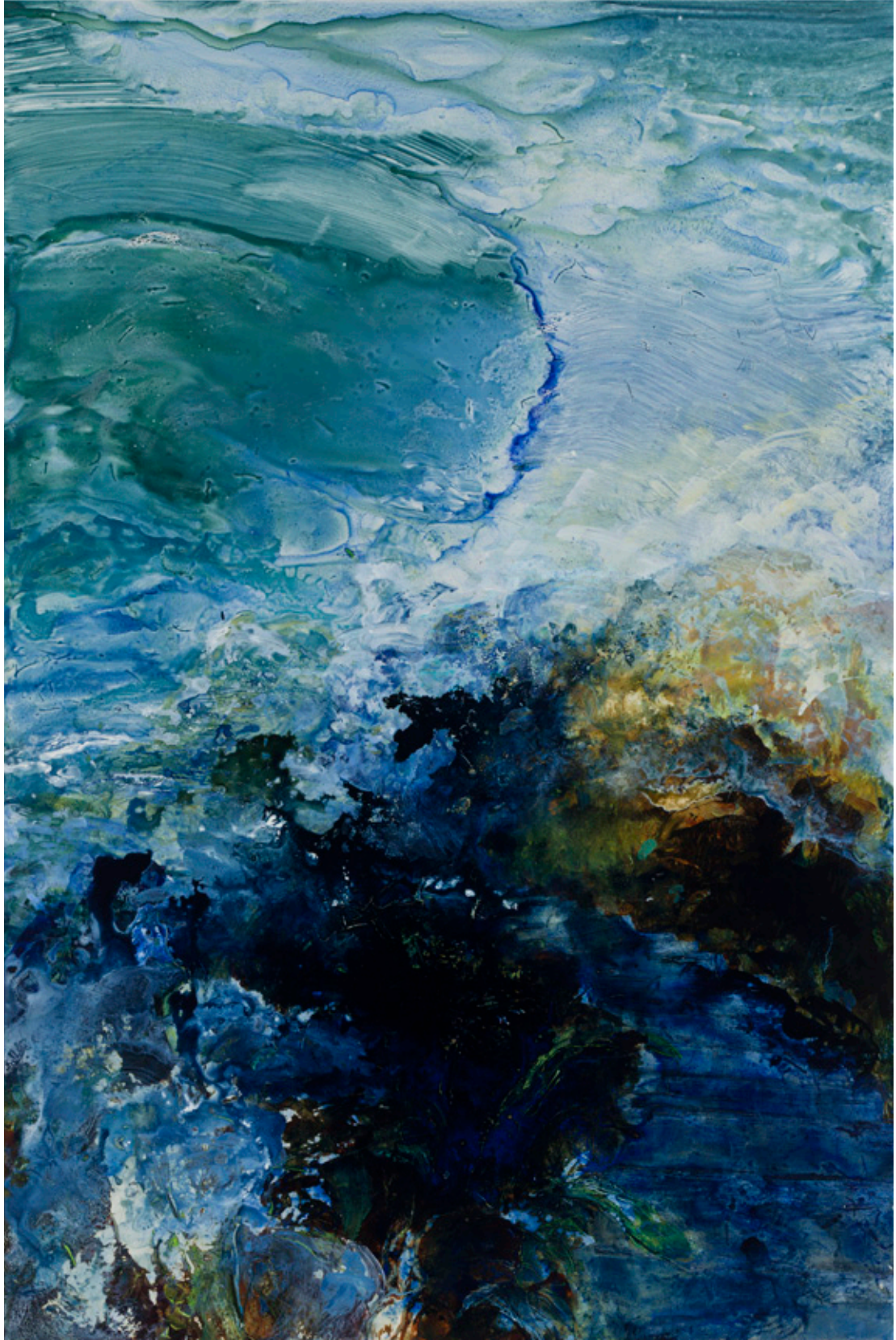


































































22 *Fall Purse*





## Catalogue Checklist

### PLATE 1

*Successor*, 2015  
Acrylic on Yupo paper  
39 x 24 inches (99.1 x 61 cm)

### PLATE 2

*Mercurial*, 2017  
Acrylic on Yupo paper  
36½ x 30 inches (92.7 x 76.2 cm)

### PLATE 3

*Folding of a Season*, 2015  
Acrylic on Yupo paper  
25 x 27 inches (63.5 x 68.6 cm)

### PLATE 4

*La La Lily*, 2015  
Oil on Yupo paper  
35 x 52 inches (88.9 x 132.1 cm)

### PLATE 5

*Counting*, 2017  
Acrylic on metal  
Two panels, each: 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)  
Overall: 24 x 48 inches (61 x 121.9 cm)

### PLATE 6

*Edited Remembering*, 2017  
Acrylic on metal  
Two panels, each: 30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)  
Overall: 30 x 60 inches (76.2 x 152.4 cm)

### PLATE 7

*Link*, 2017  
Acrylic on metal  
Two panels, each: 30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)  
Overall: 30 x 60 inches (76.2 x 152.4 cm)

### PLATE 8

*Avram*, 2017  
Acrylic on Yupo paper  
38½ x 59 inches (97.8 x 149.9 cm)

### PLATE 9

*Noah*, 2017  
Acrylic on Yupo paper  
41 x 60 inches (104.1 x 152.4 cm)

### PLATE 10

*Undertow*, 2016  
Acrylic on metal  
Two panels, each: 36 x 24 inches (91.4 x 61 cm)  
Overall: 36 x 48 inches (91.4 x 121.9 cm)

### PLATE 11

*Primordial*, 2016  
Acrylic on metal  
36 x 24 inches (91.4 x 61 cm)

### PLATE 12

*Source*, 2017  
Acrylic on metal  
30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)

### PLATE 13

*Surge*, 2016  
Acrylic on metal  
Four panels, each: 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)  
Overall: 48 x 48 inches (121.9 x 121.9 cm)

### PLATE 14

*Flotsam and Jetsam*, 2016  
Acrylic on metal  
Two panels, each: 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)  
Overall: 24 x 48 inches (61 x 121.9 cm)

### PLATE 15

*O L'eau*, 2016  
Acrylic on metal  
24 x 37 inches (61 x 94 cm)

### PLATE 16

*Cover*, 2017  
Three panels, each: 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)  
Overall: 24 x 72 inches (61 x 182.9 cm)

## Biography

### PLATE 17

*Otis*, 2017

Acrylic on Yupo paper

42 x 43 inches (106.7 x 109.2 cm)

### PLATE 18

*Sum Of*, 2017

Acrylic on metal

Three panels, each: 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)

Overall: 24 x 72 inches (61 x 182.9 cm)

### PLATE 19

*Folding the Landscape*, 2017

Acrylic on Yupo paper

28 x 44½ inches (71.1 x 113 cm)

### PLATE 20

*Beginning and End*, 2017

Acrylic on Yupo paper

40 x 48½ inches (101.6 x 123.2 cm)

### PLATE 21

*Walking Walden*, 2015

Acrylic on Yupo paper

38 x 45½ inches (96.5 x 115.6 cm)

### PLATE 22

*Fall Purse*, 2015

Acrylic on Yupo paper

36½ x 24¾ inches (92.7 x 62.9 cm)

### PLATE 23

*Medulla*, 2015

Acrylic on Yupo paper

36 x 24½ inches (91.4 x 62.2 cm)

ILANA MANOLSON was born in 1956 in Calgary, Alberta. Manolson received a degree from Goddard College where she studied botany and art (1978), and went on to receive a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (1982), whereupon graduation she partnered at Artist's Proof, an intaglio studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1982–84). She is a recipient of a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellowship for Painting (2008–10); a St. Botolph Artist Grant, Boston (2002), and an Artists Foundation Installation Grant from the State of Massachusetts (1989). She has held residencies at the Leighton Art Colony at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Banff, Canada (2017); in Ballinglen, Ireland (2008, 2007, 2006); the Yaddo Artist Colony, Saratoga Springs, NY (1989), and the Banff School of the Arts, Banff, Canada (1981). Institutional exhibitions of her work include the Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA (2015, 2012, 2011, 2010); Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH (2015); Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, MA (2012); Concord Art Museum, Concord, MA (2012); Boston Public Library, Boston, MA (2012, 2001); Endicott College, Beverly, MA (2009); Gordon College, Wenham, MA (2009); Ballin Castle Museum, Ballinglen, Ireland (2007); Regis College, Weston, MA (2006); De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, MA (2006); Fuller Museum, Brockton, MA (1989); Newport Museum, Newport, RI (1988); Attleboro Museum, Attleboro, MA (1988), and the Brockton Museum, Brockton, MA (1987). Manolson's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, MA; Fuller Museum of Art, Brockton, MA; Danforth Museum, Framingham, MA; Boston Public Library, Boston, MA; Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA; Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Ireland, and the Berkeley Museum of Art, CA, among others. Manolson lives and works in Concord, Massachusetts and Sausalito, California.

This publication accompanies the exhibition:

Ilana Manolson: Sum of

Jason McCoy Gallery

41 East 57th Street

New York, NY 10022

T: 212-319-1996 F: 212-319-4799

*info@jasonmccoyinc.com www.jasonmccoyinc.com*

June 6 – July 28, 2017



Jason McCoy

Stephen M. Cadwalader

Stephanie B. Simmons, Director

Amanda Konishi

Catalogue © Jason McCoy, Inc., 2017

Photograph of the artist © Sharona Jacobs, 2017

*Ilana Manolson: Sum of* © by Stephanie Buhmann, 2017

Photographs of works of art reproduced in this catalogue have been provided by the owners or custodians of the works and are protected by copyright in the United States of America and elsewhere and may not be reproduced in any form without express permission of the copyright owners. The following photographic credits appear at the request of the artist's representatives and/or the owners of individual works.

Photography: Will Howcroft; Craig Koris

Catalogue design: Lawrence Sunden, Inc.

Printing: The Studley Press













JASON MCCOY GALLERY

NEW YORK