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INNER VISION

## Liz Dexheimer Embraces 'Atmospheric Conditions'

*At Rice Polak, an artist's abstract paintings create a meditative space*

BY SUSAN RAND BROWN · AUG 17, 2022

It isn't easy finding Liz Dexheimer's studio if you haven't been there before. Cellphone reception is spotty in this remote area of Connecticut, and even with detailed directions its gray exterior and steeply pitched roofline are easy to miss.



Liz Dexheimer describes her process while completing *Atmospheric Conditions Blues III*. (Photo by Susan Rand Brown)

But once you're there, you enter another world. Her studio's interior — overflowing with the blues, violets, and yellows of paintings and prints in various stages of completion — resembles a summer garden, fragrant with paint and oils instead of roses and peonies.

After living and working in the heart of Manhattan for decades, Dexheimer says that her new surroundings — she moved here about 15 years ago — have been transformative. This is the first time she's had a studio separate from her home, which has enabled her to work

larger and be surrounded by more of her objects and materials.

While Dexheimer's work has been in solo and group shows elsewhere for many years, it is being shown here for the first time thanks to Provincetown gallery director Marla Rice, who reached out to the artist several months ago.

"She must have seen my work in galleries in New York City and Boston," says Dexheimer. "I've been quite fortunate. The galleries I've worked with have always found me."



Liz Dexheimer's painting "Atmospheric Conditions Blues II." (Photo courtesy Rice Polak Gallery)

Dexheimer's painting *Atmospheric Conditions Blues II*, part of a series, is in her debut show at Rice Polak, which opens on Aug. 18 and will be on view for two weeks. Its broad swell of blue could be the color of a lover's eyes, or the ocean, or a field of lavender. A patch of white suggests a cloud on the horizon.

Cascades of dark grays descend like more clouds in *Atmospheric Conditions Deep*, where swathes of golden yellow create soft trails through the haze like traces of sunlight.



Dexheimer's painting Atmospheric Conditions Deep. (Photo courtesy Rice Polak Gallery)

Despite its evocation of natural elements, however, Dexheimer's work can't be neatly categorized. "I guess I am a landscape painter, even though I'm not looking at the landscape when I'm painting," she says. "But I don't mean to be referencing a specific landscape. In this painting in particular, I'm just interested in showing light.

"Atmosphere has always been really evocative for me," she says. "The nuances, how light changes perception. Everything has so much to do with light and how it falls."

Her approach recalls the way Helen Frankenthaler, who lived and painted in Provincetown in the 1950s and '60s, described her work, which used natural motifs as a catalyst for abstraction: "I had the landscape in my arms when I painted it. I had the landscapes in my mind and shoulder and wrist."



Dexheimer's painting Coastal Series VIII. (Photo courtesy Rice Polak Gallery)

That same abstracted yet deeply felt quality is apparent in Dexheimer's work. If her paintings read as landscapes, their source is actually an inner vision that suggests a universal rather than a particular or personal experience in nature. Painting becomes a spiritual and meditative process: "I push myself to go deeper and deeper: I keep going and going."

Yet, far from being solipsistic, Dexheimer's paintings create space for a viewer to enter and explore. Their spare palette and tranquility derive from her study of East Asian art at Oberlin, where she also learned printmaking techniques.

And Dexheimer says the influence of Asian art continues to inform her practice. She says she finds a sense of calm in it that "evokes something left slightly unsaid."

Back in her studio, Dexheimer pulls a monotype from a neatly stacked shelf. Splashes of bright color wash over the surface. The reds are reflections of cherry blossoms.

She feels the pebbly surfaces of a group of unprimed canvases: "I love the feeling of the canvas, its texture," she says. "Sometimes you can just take advantage of the texture. It's all part of the experience."

During her years in Manhattan, Dexheimer kept her artistic practice separate from her successful career as a media planner for two advertising agencies. But now it's her studio work that has become all-absorbing. Asked if she paints every day, Dexheimer admits to taking weekends off. "But," she says, "there is nothing in the world I'd really rather be doing."

#### **Art show**

**The event:** Works by Liz Dexheimer, Adam Graham, Joshua Meyer, and Craig Mooney

**The time:** Aug. 18 to 31; opening reception Friday, Aug. 19, 7 to 9 p.m.

**The place:** Rice Polak Gallery, 430 Commercial St., Provincetown

**The cost:** Free