

2007

## Internal spaces

Regina Loch-Elvert

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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INTERNAL SPACES

A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Regina Loch-Elvert  
B.A., University of Tübingen, 1986  
B.F.A., University of Oregon, 1997  
August, 2007

To my parents

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

The abstract paintings in this thesis exhibition are about spatial relations deriving from landscapes. Memory, moods, feelings, and intuition, as well as color relations, shapes, expressive brushstrokes, and the paint itself are important elements in achieving the intended meaning and effects. My method involves painting and over-painting, changing the painting constantly until it is what I wanted it to become without knowing it in advance—a process in which the painting eventually becomes itself by its own volition. But when do I feel my painting is really finished? I feel like an adventurer, a discoverer, when I paint; I want something challenging and rewarding to emerge from my painting. I have to accept a certain mystery about the end of things. I see my art as a search for spiritual meaning and as a way of living, both of which emerge through the energy I expend in its execution.

## INTERNAL SPACES

‘The Real in Art never dies, because its nature is predominantly spiritual....’

*Search for the Real in the Visual Art.* Hans Hofmann

Why do I paint the way I do? I recently asked myself this question and after some reflection it occurred to me that the reason for becoming an abstract expressionist began with my adolescence. While growing up in Frankfurt, Germany, I was first exposed to German Expressionism when my parents frequently took me to art galleries and museum exhibitions.

My first memory of ‘making a picture’ goes back to age three when I drew my five-year-old sister sitting on a chair at a table with colored pencils. She was wearing a plaid skirt and sat in a room, which I indicated with lines in perspective. One of my most vivid childhood memories at this time was a trip into the Taunus, a mountainous region near Frankfurt. Looking out of the rear window while my father was driving home, I observed a setting sun above the horizon and admired its golden red color and light. At that moment, I imagined and wished I could run after it, fixing the sun just above the horizon, never disappearing, and holding time at bay for me to always see. When I translate this experience onto the canvas, when light, matter, and time itself are controlled, I feel I have succeeded.

While growing up in Germany, I was not only introduced to German Expressionism, but also to Italian art through summer vacation trips to Venice, Florence and Rome. When I saw Michelangelo’s sculptures and frescos for the first time, I felt very much in love with the

monumentality and powerful expression of the human body, as well as their expression of tension and melancholy as seen in his Old Testament figures in the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo's art was like a religion for me and for several years I occupied myself reading about his life and drawing from his works, in order to learn anatomy and proportion of the human figure. This monumentality and intense emotional expression of his figures are what inspire me in my expressionist style. I relate the physical expression of this physical power to the physicality and energy I want to express through the movement of my marks and brushstrokes.

Besides nature and the visual arts, it was music that played an important part in my life, and still does. I practiced playing the violin daily in high school and college. The influence of music is reflected in my paintings through abstract motifs moving in and out of the composition. I imagine counterpoint in music and set up tension in my paintings: cools versus warm, small versus large, area versus shape, broad versus linear. I hear syncopation, and I react with brushstrokes of intense or grayed color. Last but not least, I devoted much time to reading literature of human dramas by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorki. I also read Soren Kirkegaard and delved into his questioning of existentialism. My love for 'red' always feels to me to be of Dostoyevsky - sad and passionate, yet I see Kirkegaard in the recording of the immediacy of the marks made by my hand and brush.

It was not until I moved to the United States that I consciously felt the impact of American art, contemporary as well as old. I first lived in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York on the upper floor of an old Victorian house overlooking the Palisades, across from the Hudson River. In a nearby museum, I saw for the first time, paintings of the Hudson River School artists of the 19<sup>th</sup>



Century. It was George Inness, who especially inspired me with his deep space and orange/golden tones of sunset scenes. Their work was concerned with a new idea, that of the 'sublime.' It is a sense of a potentiality, of great power often of a destructive sense, inherent in nature. This idea can be seen in 'Composing in Minor,' as I used short, broad, rugged and forceful brushstrokes filling in most of the canvas surface, only coming to a halt through a light vibrant blue rectangular shaped brushstroke. The 'sublime in nature' also refers to the visible forms of material beauty in nature, yet implying a deep sense of the invisible and immaterial. In that sense, I thrive for truthfulness, for a genuine expression of how I feel through color, and its expression of space and time, and the give and take of positive and negative space as in 'Blue Grass.' I also compare the thought of invisible and immaterial qualities to abstract compositions, expressing the deeper thing inside the human being.

Later, living on the West Coast, I referred back to the Hudson River School styles and color schemes conjured up by the Oregon wilderness. I explored a wide range of American artists on this subject matter of vast landscape, and noticed that I chose those for inspiration that had a heightened emotional expression through color, paint handling, and a dramatic sense of space. In furthering my education of American painting, an important breakthrough was triggered by my discovery of Hans Hofmann and his abstract expressions of color fields. According to him, 'depth' is not created on a flat surface as an illusion, but rather as a plastic reality. In other words, the effect of 'push -and pull,' through contrast of cool and warm colors, sharp versus soft edges, a field versus shape, and shape versus line; to re-establish the reality of a two-dimensional picture plane, made complete sense to me. I am suddenly not required to hold on to illusions, symbols, or representations. Emmanuel Kant said in his *Critique of Judgment* in 1796: "what

counts in painting is not meaning, but the feeling aroused in the viewer.” Working with paint like this is comparable to playing a game of chess: it goes back and forth, move and counter-move.

My fascination with all these effects goes back to my memory of the setting sun. The moment of the sun setting, with all its visual effects, contains the record of the whole day’s events. This idea of consciousness of time, which also simultaneously means space for me, is a permanent one, emerging again and again. From external spaces as those of landscapes, I developed my paintings into expressions of internal spaces of myself.

## **DAYS IN MY STUDIO**

January 2, 2007

As soon as I enter the studio, it is only my painting and I. I go straight to Blue Air, the painting I worked on yesterday, and decide to scrape off an area of pthalo green in the upper left half of the painting in order to get a fresher, cooler look with a new layer of ultramarine blue. I want to achieve fluidity with the paint, as opposed to opaque density. The fluidity and transparency becomes the fleeting moment of time.

January 9, 2007

It does not look right to me, the painting from yesterday. Spatial relations are not working. I am not shooting for aerial or linear perspective, not for the illusion of space, but for the “plastic reality,” the establishment of the picture plane achieved through Hofmann’s push-and-pull effect. I have to readjust relations of color to color and at the same time, relationships between shapes, and areas of color to shapes. In the beginning, I give in to the impulse of first choosing color and shape, and then wait for the paint to answer, telling me about the nature of space the colored shapes will occupy.

January 16, 2007

The first thing today is to examine the work from yesterday. I am curious how I will perceive it. I see that I want to reduce color in my ‘Red’ painting, over paint areas of green/blue color, in order to focus more on the warm tones of red, brown and purple, even pink. It seems to make more

sense to me to achieve full resonance of the red color's existence. It looks like red rain, but more importantly it is the power and force of red.

February 2, 2007

The recorded movement of my brushstrokes is not creating the desired dynamic. When I look at the dense blue and gray brushstrokes of my most recent painting, "C Minor," despite their irregularity, they all move in the same direction. I decide to add counter brushstrokes and eliminate those that seem redundant. I want my eyes to move through this jungle of brushstrokes and to shove the viewer in various directions; creating an exciting dynamic. At the same time, I want to convey the emotional quality of the color, and the peculiar identity of the space.

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony comes to my mind. The ever-returning theme, and underlying melody ending in a final accord, when all the voices of the different musical instruments are joined together into a loud, jubilant and final sound, followed by silence.

February 9, 2007

I really like to apply these thin layers of paint onto the canvas; it is like letting the paint breathe. But then I run into a difficult passage: the part where two different colors meet, the passage of overlapping paint. The physicality of the thinned down oil paint allows it to freely flow on the canvas surface; it makes its own way in terms of direction and space. Only my interference interrupts its flow and by doing so, I determine compositional issues and expression. The solution to the painting lies in the quality of that transition: it could be a hard edge, or a soft one,

or even a third color by mixing the two adjacent colors together. Sometimes I let it drip, but this can become a cliché, so I try laying this painting on the floor, in order to control the seam.

February 20, 2007

This morning in my studio, my “Red Painting,” which I thought I had finished earlier, caught my eye. The contrasts and tensions I felt I had accomplished no longer felt strong enough. I need to create a stronger push-and-pull effect. The phthalo green vertical brushstrokes in the red area were not working as I thought they were. They reminded me of steel beams at a construction site, too orderly and linear. I had reversed the effect of cool and warm colors by letting the cooler green overlap and come forward on an ardently red background. I wanted to achieve a full resonance of the already powerful existence of the color red. I decide to over paint the green with red and mix the wet colors of green on the canvas with blue and red, and with some titanium white with a little yellow tonality. I achieve a surprising effect. This creation of a new area of gray tones recede now in space and the whole composition falls into place. I am excited. I have caught the sun!

March 1, 2007

Back in my studio where I feel with no restrictions. To create something new, to let something come into existence through only my doing energizes me to action. I am thinking of red again, how natural it comes to hand, creating with red. I give in and start with it again. But next time, I tell myself, “I will not choose red!”

March 10, 2007

I painted for a long time today. I added another color, then I combined two existing colors into one new shape. I have no title for the painting yet, I will find it later. It is a yellow space and I tell myself something will come out of this. I won't stop until it happens, so I continue to paint. But when will it happen? I remember the expression of physical power in the monumental and twisted figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the tension of the space between the hand of God and Adam. I remember the idea of the "sublime." "How can I push this power of this yellow space?" I ask myself as I wash my brushes and clean up for the day.

March 12, 2007

The same painting from last time: now I see a dense space, like a fog, the yellow area of broad brushstrokes juxtaposed with the brown/red, plump, oval shape and accents of Prussian blue. It does not make complete visual sense to me yet, but it is starting to become something, it is starting to speak. The long vertical line off-center I add is giving the painting a taller, wider feeling, another dimension. Often the irrational is part of the painting process. What works is sometimes coincidence; not everything can be explained, or predicted. I have to exist in often unknown territory to find the visual power I seek.

March 23, 2007

Today, I want to paint something new, something more concrete than passionate. I am looking at De Kooning's paintings. I see how he sets off colors, and tones of color, between the painted subject and its surrounding space. I see how he dealt with the transition from negative to positive space. I start with black, red and white and I mix it with yellow. I added phthalo blue into my palette. What I then painted looked like a building; there was no space in the painting. I turn away from the original idea and try to stop thinking. Intuitively, I mixed a phthalo blue with some

cadmium red as a background color. I state it along the edges and corners of the painting, a mixture that turns into a light blue green as it physically mixes with the wet colors on the canvas at the left opposite side. This becomes the exit of the image. The existing shapes are painted with broad speedy brushstrokes of purple, red and warm yellow. I set them off in different directions across the square sized canvas, now expressing gesture and color. It started with an idea about concrete reality, but evolves into what I realize is the emotional truth of this day. I name this painting “Twist.” Thoughts translated into visual realization become different thoughts.

...

Often, I can hardly wait to get to my studio and start painting. As soon as I get there, I rush to look where I had left the painting yesterday. I see the unfinished work and something strikes me. This unverballed idea of mine does not last long and I have to paint fast in order to bring it out. I move like a dancer, back and forth, between the painting, the paint tubes, and the palette. The paint is with me, reacting to my move. I begin to almost taste the paint. I not only paint onto the canvas, but into it. I go back into the picture plane and come out in the front. This process is a self-realization: layers in my paintings expressing immediacies, each layer expressing a day or moment in my life. Yet, each painting now has its own language, not a verbal one, but a visual one, and its own internal space and life, born of mine.

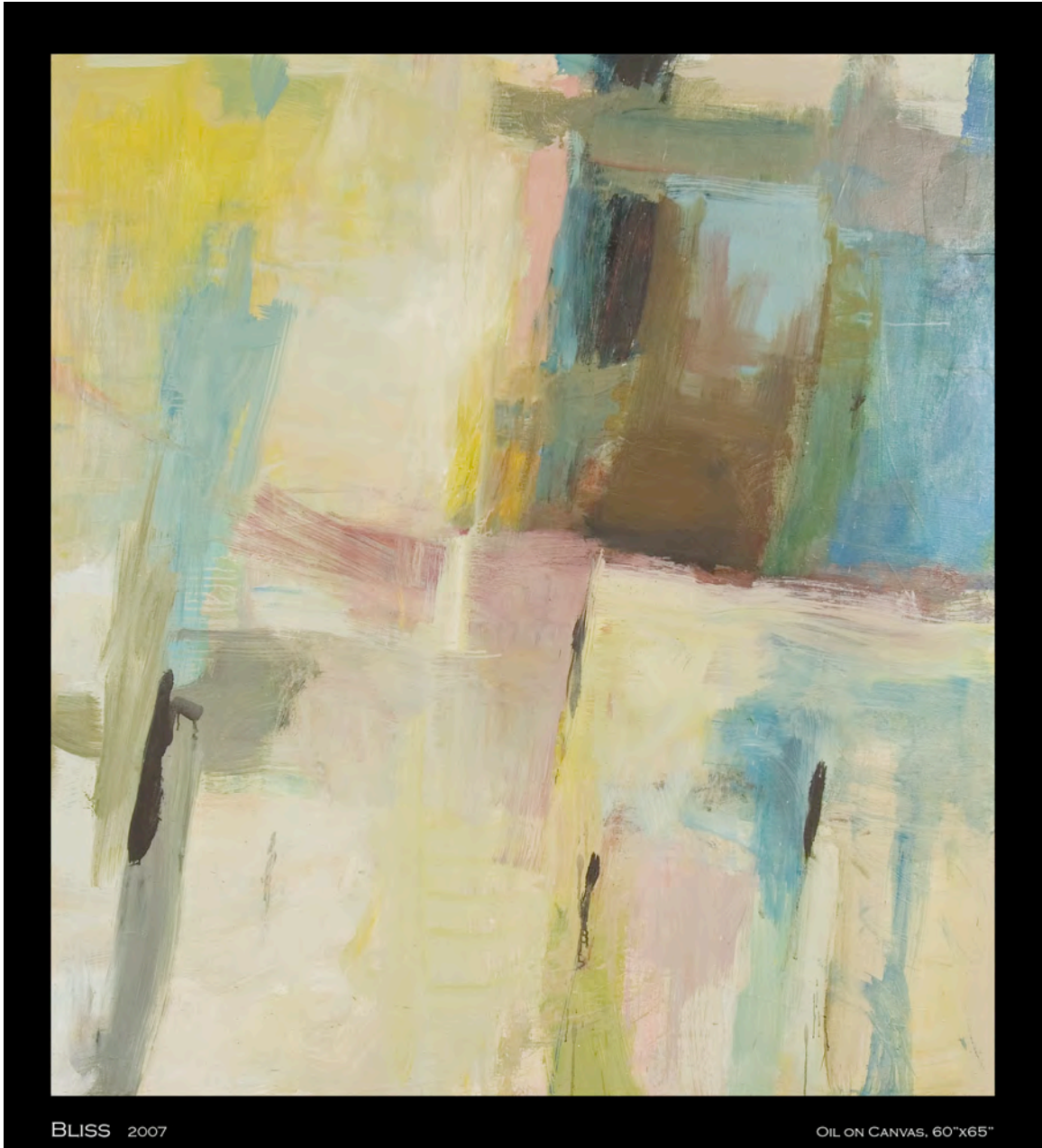
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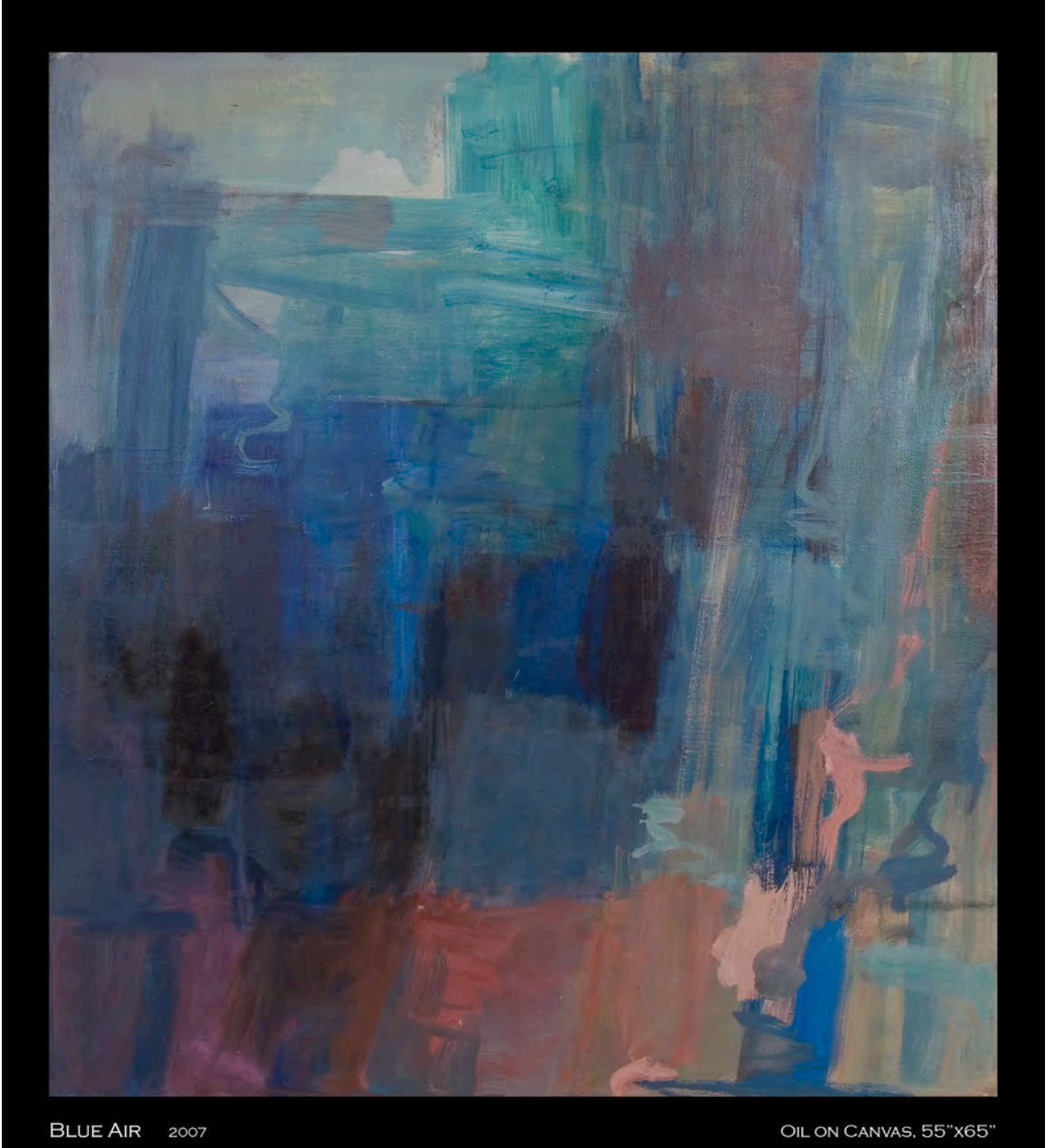
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Yohe, James, editor. *Hans Hofmann* (New York: Rizzoli, 2002).



IMAGES





BLUE AIR 2007

OIL ON CANVAS, 55"X65"



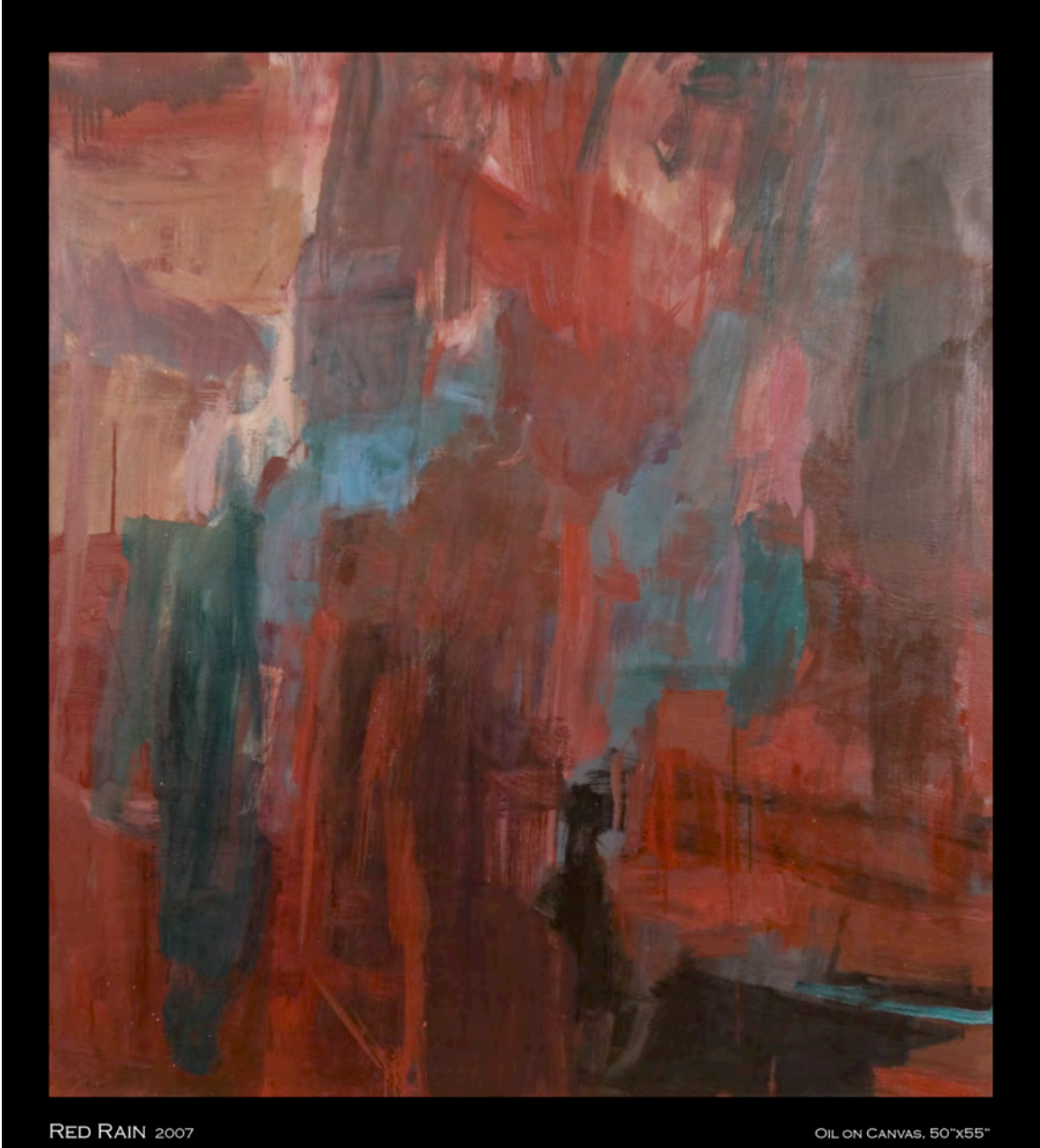
C MINOR 2007

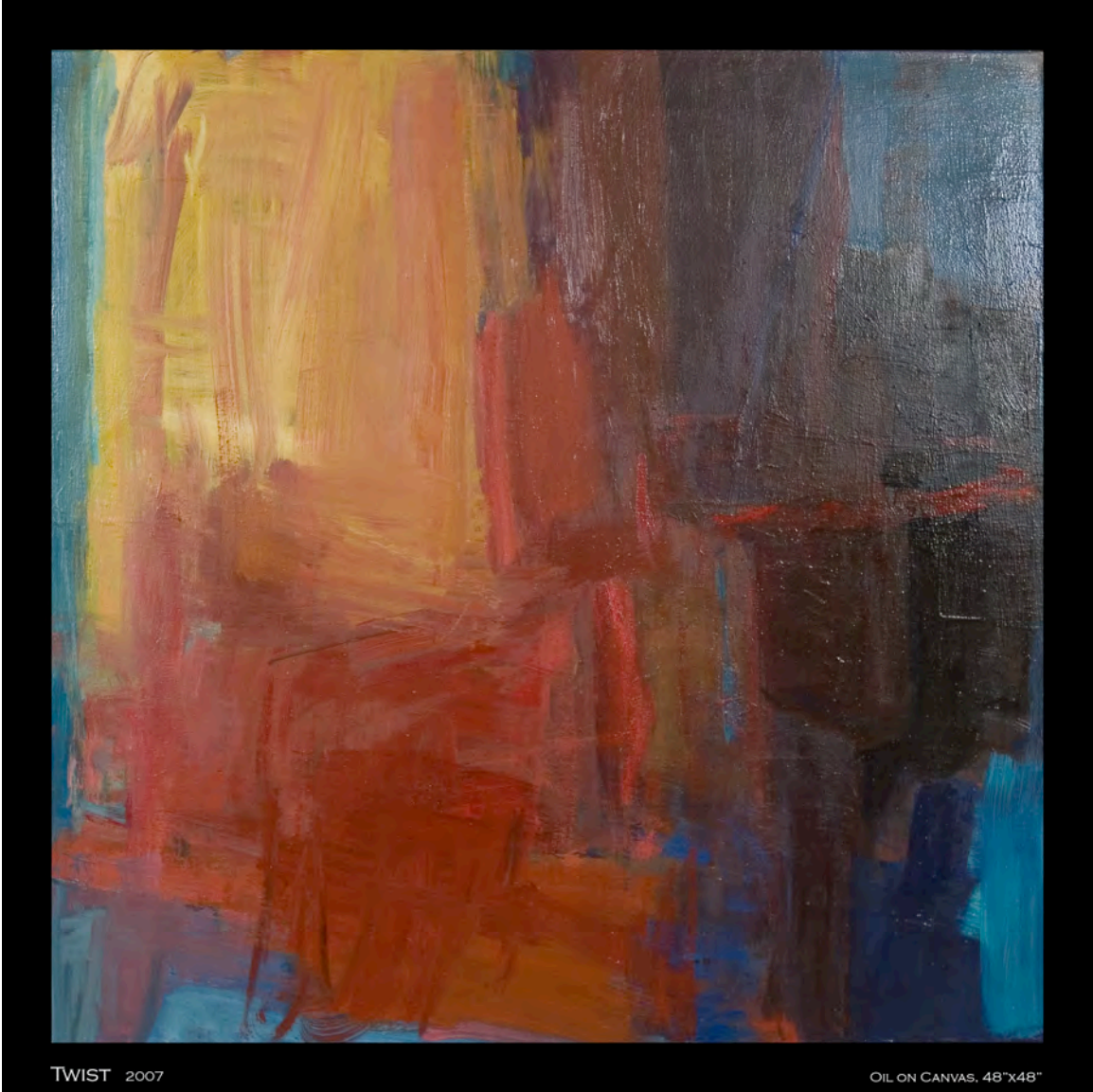
OIL ON CANVAS, 50"x45"



RED DESCENDING 2007

OIL ON CANVAS, 60"x50"





TWIST 2007

OIL ON CANVAS, 48"x48"

## VITA

Regina Loch-Elvert was born in Berlin-Tempelhof, Germany, and grew up attending schools in Heidelberg, Munich, Frankfurt/Main and finally Tübingen in southern Germany.

In Tübingen she graduated from the Eberhardt-Karls University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history. She also attended the Art Academy in Salzburg, Austria, during the summer.

After marriage in 1986, she moved to Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, where she became a certified Montessori teacher, and taught in a Montessori school in Ardsley, New York. In 1988 she moved to Eugene, Oregon, where she decided to devote her time exclusively to painting, and enrolled at the University of Oregon, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting in 1997.

Thereafter, she participated in painting workshops at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont, and at the New York Studio School in New York City. She was selected into the Oregon State Art commission, as well as into the Washington State Art Commission for public art work.

In 2003, she moved with her husband to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and in 2004, she began working on her Master of Fine Arts at the Louisiana State University which she will finish in August, 2007.