

Critic's Chronicle

Davila, Ash "Sky Glabush's Living Canvas: 'When the Veil Is Lifted,'" *Critic's Chronicle*, February 14, 2025.



Sky Glabush at Stephen Friedman Gallery, 2024. Photo by Alejandro Jassan Studio.

Klimt, Canada, Deadhead, Seamus Heaney - all these disparate threads anchor and inspire Sky Glabush's work. His abstract paintings often depict landscape scenes but also encompass more experimental aspects that abound with textural interplay. His work is rooted in exploring the tension between recognizable places and the ephemeral. Glabush explains that his paintings are in "this moment where it's not really abstract and it's not really figurative, it's not landscape and it's not purely open. It's this tension between trying to describe something that people can recognize, but also it's breaking down and falling apart, and something new is being imagined and something new is happening."

Attentiveness and attunement are hallmarks of Sky's work. As both a working artist and a professor, he is keenly aware of the toll making art and following one's heart can take. From traveling around in his youth to follow the Grateful Dead, to returning to Canada as a mature student and falling into the study of great modernist poets, Glabush's journey has been varied. Seamus Heaney's poem "Alphabet" acted as inspiration for his latest exhibit in New York City at the Stephen Friedman gallery: "The letters of this alphabet were trees." Contextually, Glabush understands the balance of concealing and revealing, ranging from familiar lines in a poem to rivers and trees in Canada. One of his recent paintings, "Firelight in Pine Forest," is not about a place in Canada but rather explores the influence of Klimt. Glabush reflects that for that painting he "was really thinking about Klimt, thinking about color, thinking about creating, like, a beautiful, almost like a carpet or a tapestry, in terms of the space of the painting. So that one was about Klimt and also about Canada, because right behind my house is a pine forest, and I do go back there, and I did take photographs of it. So it's both Klimt and me, and my world."

Connection between the world and the work stems in part from Glabush's connection with the Baha'i faith - the trees, firelight, and rivers as central topics are in dialogue with the tenet of grounded connection. He says that "in the Baha'i Faith... Everything in the physical realm is also a reflection of something that exists in a kind of a spiritual realm. So there's no distinction between the physical reality and the spiritual. They're totally one, it's one reality. However, ego and violence and anger and pride, and competition sort of are like veils. But when you move away from violence, and you move towards connection, then the truth of a relationship becomes like when the veil is lifted."

In one of his largest pieces to date, Glabush's "Early Light at Robin Lake" spans two panels, overall reaching 84 x 192 inches. This piece features effulgent sunbeams bursting through a orange and red-hued forest; sand mixed with paint adds a granular and realistic feel to the painting. Glabush has reflected on continuing to turn to landscape in order to reflect a shared language. "Even though it's about trees or about the sun or whatever, partly, that's just an excuse to create that feeling of connection. Sometimes people think the spiritual is the sublime, or some transcendental thing, but the spiritual can be blood and pain and fear. It's not just about what makes you feel good, it's whatever you're encountering that's increasing that feeling of connection, and that feeling of like you feel real."

"I live and breathe modernist history, especially the moment leading up to abstraction, when the image was being destroyed, distilled, invented, and transformed, but was still an image."— Sky Glabush, 2024

Glabush has reflected on and been inspired by modernist poets - and as W.B. Yeats once said, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." From his work both as a professor but even more so as a modern artist, Glabush pulses and pushes to light a fire and create a conversation about what it means to be so deeply connected, even though in his own words, "art is difficult and actually quite painful, and it never gets easy." His work sands away at the veil and attempts to understand the journey.