

Neuman, Barry N. "On the Abstract and the Material: 'Gabriel Hartley: Waterwood' At Foxy Production." *Modern Culture* / Barry N. Neuman /Facebook 12 Jan. 2020. Web.

Modern Culture

During a winter bridging two decades, it's valuable to be reminded of dualities, including one that reconciles the sensory and the illusionary. In "Gabriel Hartley: Waterwood," at Foxy Production, presence and imagination glide back and forth and raptly engage a gallery visitor's way of seeing and contemplating works that are extraordinary – that is, out of the ordinary, truly.

With one exception, the works are composed of ink and acrylic on carved wood. Approached from afar, they initially appear to be the kinds of tableaux typically found in most painting exhibitions, but they have a level of intrigue that draws one in for a closer look. From an invisible threshold within the gallery, a depth of field in each work intimates itself to the viewer. Even though the works are abstract, they appear to be out of nature but not everyday nature; they appear to be extractions of the mystical kind.

"Fen" is a case in point. Inexplicably, it conjured up in mind "Ophelia," by Sir John Everett Millais. The sense of finding oneself gazing upon a heightened exemplification of an up-close detail of a landscape here is palpable. Its seeming to capture a moment in time in an isolated space in the woods and alongside a stream is remarkable and uncanny, especially as one regards the pigmentation that is visible on its surface and integrated within the grain of its substrate. Only at this writing did the viewer realize that the work is, indeed, named after a low and marshy area of land; the phenomenon materialized itself before its name.

Each of the other works in the exhibition offers its own bit of spectacle. In one painting, a pre-historic cave wall may arise for a viewer. In others, the intensified awareness of the properties and beauty of wood may elevate a viewer's realization that the artist possesses a poetic capability for working with his materials and communicating their combined wonderments; the absorption of the tinting media and the lustrous character of his chosen pigments upon the works' surfaces are marvels to gaze upon, and, in searching for a comparison with another artist, one might be tempted to think of Hartley as a Pre-Raphaelite Robert Ryman.

Counterpointing all of this is a gem of a painting, an oil-and-ink-on-panel work, titled, "Over." Plainly stated, it belongs on the walls of Gallery 914 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Today's the final day of Hartley's show at Foxy Production. Go there today. It's a beautiful day to be startled and enchanted.

"Gabriel Hartley: Waterwood"
Foxy Production,
2 East Broadway #200, New York NY 10038

On view through 12 January 2020