

Priscilla Heine

by Janet Goleas, Curator

Over the past three decades, Priscilla Heine has developed a potent visual language that is as flexible as it is complex, allowing her to assimilate both the immediate world and the internal world that emanates from within. Drawing from both sources, Heine's paintings are lyrical and romantic and at the same they engage in a fierce dialogue with the present. Among dense tangles and strokes of pigment, bare linen and swirls of charcoal, her imagery erupts before you as painterly moments coalesce to create a whole.

The walls of her East Hampton studio, located in the thick woodlands at Cedar Point, are lined with lively canvasses, sprightly gnarls of fabric and stacks of books and drawings. Canny and intuitive, in her compositions Heine glides across color pools and stretches of raw canvas with a sort of old school bravura that is deeply satisfying. She is, in a word, fearless. In combining the elements of drawing, gesture and abstraction, she intuits her subject, giving character to the moments, places, objects and things that populate her canvases. Taken altogether, the works engage us in the very act of seeing as she locates meaning through the process of painting.

Heine doesn't interpret the world around her so much as she absorbs it, bringing it to life through the fulcrum of her arm, the tip of a wrist or the elegant scrawls that fly off her fingertips.

Growing up in New York City, Priscilla Heine knew from the start she wanted to be an artist. Frequent trips to museums, galleries, visits to sundry art collections and stumbling upon this or that artist working there helped fuel her passion. She began exhibiting her work in the early 1980s, shortly after receiving her Master of Fine Art in Painting from the Boston Museum School. Heine spent these formative years as a developing artist painting and working on the Lower East Side, a hotbed of groundbreaking artistic activity. For Heine, an inveterate traveler, her many summers spent on the Mediterranean, the Vermont countryside where she maintains a studio and the Northeastern coastline where she has lived since 1992 with her husband and two sons have also deeply influenced her artistic vision. In her constant explorations, Heine's painting has morphed from autobiographical imagery to color field paintings to lyric abstractions and free form sculpture.

An inventive colorist, her use of pigment is opulent and candid, lending a lush poetry to her work. In the painting, *Under the Lilies*, a spray of wild Calla Lilies startles the center of the composition, as if the artist has stumbled upon them in a nearby wood. Frenzied petals whirl across turquoise pods and shafts of color emerge like living root systems. Heine possesses an innate ability to create works that translate the raw material of the natural world into pure paint. Never illustrative, she infers the wild or the sentiment of being in the wild — yet the light and structure of her paintings erupts not from observation but deep within an emotive and psychological reservoir.

Utilizing a similar construct in her sculpture, Heine twists and crushes fabric pieces into knots of deconstructed squares. Slathered with pigment, the metaphor here bounces between tension and release, calm and angst, rupture and suture. Elastic — expressive, the works blossom from the inside out as if ignited through the act of wadding and clutching. On occasion, Heine places bundles on the corners, tops or sides of boxes made from clear acrylic, or snuggles them inside discarded cosmetic cases. Either way, in doing so she effectively subverts the rectangle that is so dominant in painting (the picture plane) by redistributing it from one dimension to the next.

In this complex body of work, Priscilla Heine evokes a seizure of meanings. Her painting process, deeply rooted in drawing, bounces between muscular calligraphic lines, organic figuration and personal metaphor. Layers of bold color mingle with space and gravity. Surging across broad compositional structures, the elements ravel and unravel as they deftly weave into a whole.