

Wilderness Within

painter Rick Stevens evokes the essence of his inspiration in his latest exhibition

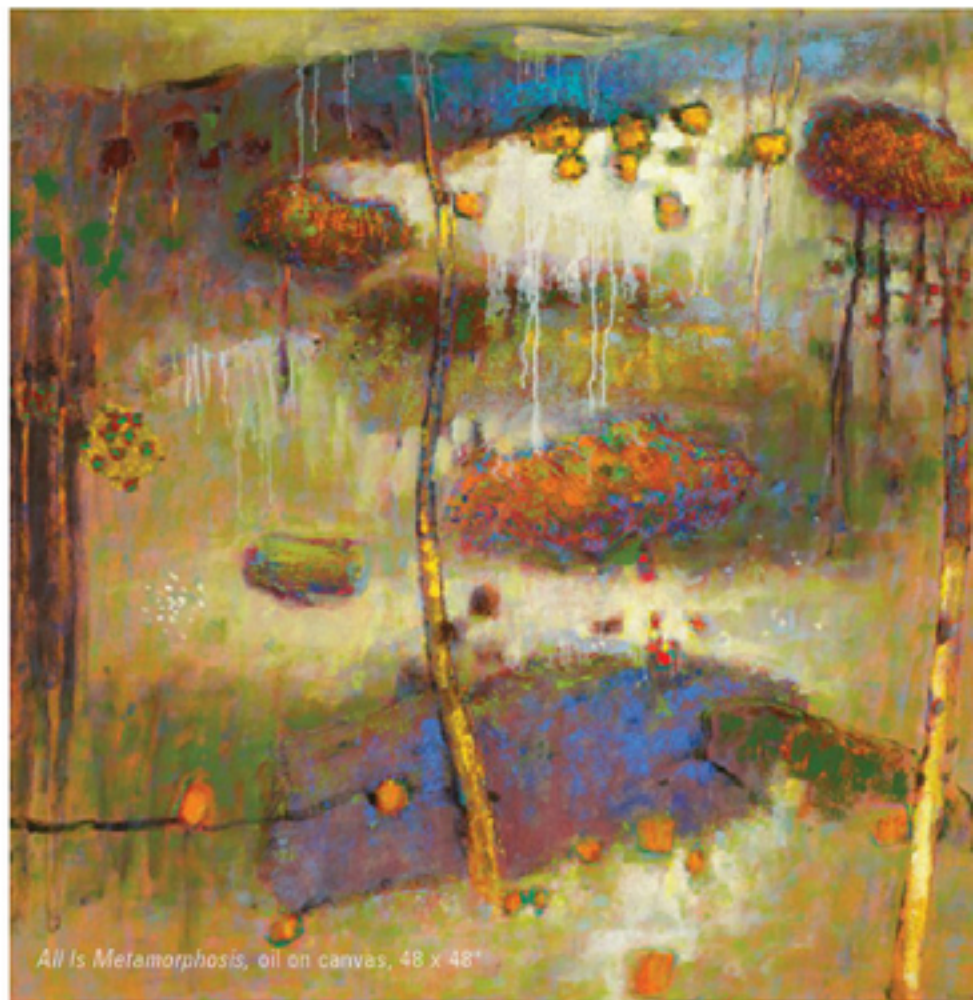
by Emily Van Cleve



Untitled No. 27-14, pastel on paper, 27 x 26"

IF THE VERTICAL LINES in Rick Stevens's latest abstract oil and pastel paintings appear to be trees, that's because nature is the artist's primary muse. He's not thinking about trees, bushes, flowers, leaves, and water when he begins working, however. He doesn't have to. Since he's spent countless hours painting outdoors over the past several decades, these images are always floating around in his mind.

Stevens's new show at Hunter Kirkland Contemporary, *Wilderness Within*, features 25 abstract paintings—paintings that depict the essence of nature and celebrate the life force that suffuses all living things, but these works are also a response to the artist's love for many different



All Is Metamorphosis, oil on canvas, 48 x 48"

genres of music, including contemporary classical, jazz, and ambient electronic.

After attending a concert at the Lensic in Santa Fe or a gig at the Outpost Performance Space in Albuquerque, Stevens is often energized and ready to begin a new work based on visual images that came to him while listening to the music. "I can get a clear sense of the direction I want to go in with a painting after hearing music," Stevens says. "I see patterns in music. Sometimes I jot down notes about the patterns I see. These patterns can become integrated into a painting," he adds.

When Stevens wants to paint a big textural piece, he reaches for oils. If he wants an immediate and more intimate painting experience, he gets out his pastels and paper. And while he may make a preliminary sketch or two, none of his paintings are preconceived. The colors and compositions evolve organically, and his materials often generate ideas. It's all about making a mark, and then responding to that mark. ■

Rick Stevens: Wilderness Within, Hunter Kirkland Contemporary, 200B Canyon, hunterkirklandcontemporary.com, June 20–July 6, reception June 20, 5–7 PM