



PATTI SAMPER

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ATMOSPHERIC LAYERS

May 23 - June 17, 2023

Essay by Moze Halperin

Photography by Bill Heuberger

**THE PAINTING CENTER**

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*Rays II*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches



In the overlapping, slow-dancing transparencies of Patti Samper's latest series of paintings, *Atmospheric Layers*, natural phenomena and the human symbols derived from them coalesce. These syntheses become reminders of our physical and ontological boundedness to our environment—amidst much of the population's alienation from it. A beguiling gentleness permeates this work. Gossamer yet vibrant, Samper's abstract forms evoke the vitality and vulnerability of nature's cycles, patterns, and structures. As environmental collapse looms, works in *Atmospheric Layers* consider humanity in relation to nature, without anthropocentrism: the ordered meaning of spiritual symbologies organically merging with, rather than subjugating, their surroundings.

The series is born of the Colombian and French, Montclair, NJ based artist's most recent return to Palomino, La Guajira, the region of her father's farm. She stayed for several weeks, deepening her ongoing relationship with members of the Arhuaco Indigenous community, whom she had grown up amongst. She spoke with the Mamos (spiritual leaders) about the imprint of climate change and the damage of enduring extractive colonialism in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: their home, the heart of their spiritual world, and Earth's highest coastal mountain range. Its glaciers are rapidly melting, its weather patterns have become mercurial, and its subsurfaces are the apple of local mining companies' eye.

Samper's serene new paintings interpolate Arhuaco spiritual and cosmological natural symbols of caracols (urumu), snakes (haku), and tree leaves (kanzachu) into abstract ecosystems. The paintings' fragile tranquility simultaneously calls to mind an unseen, underlying chaos—what our world faces if we refuse avenues to harmony with nature.

In the recurring shape of the caracol, one may feel the comfort of nature's cycles, or the disquiet of a world spiraling out of control.

With *SHIFT*, perhaps the series' most blatantly unnerved painting, Samper colors an environment of emergency and imbalance. Hues of loving pink, earthen brown, breathy blue, and sylvan green, assemble along a voluted continuum, enacting a collectivity between living and nonliving natural forces. A human crimson imitates the cyclical form the other colors sculpt—and halts and smothers them in its own imposing beauty.

Elsewhere, the encroachment of humanity is hidden, as Samper turns her gaze toward placid natural forms, heightening their delicacy and emotive splendor and, thereby, their finitude. In the playful *Rays I* and *Rays II*, Samper captures the crepuscular colors of dawn and dusk—another vision of vibrancy on the edge of transition.

In *Breathe I*, the leaves of the fig—believed to be the world's first cultivated fruit tree—denote life-enabling symbioses. The diaphanous, fluent forms in which Samper envisions them reflect the breath they give; their movement; and their impermanence, as their radiant spectrum of colors evoke seasonal shifts. This rhapsodic vision also signals a plea for reforestation—to sustain and restore life that in turn sustains and restores ours.

*Neap Tide*, a brew of ocean, algae, air, and earth, expressionistically interprets the moderate tide that occurs when the sun and moon's gravitational pulls neutralize one another. environmental replenishment—in the neap tide, wrought from the balanced relation of celestial bodies. As rising tides and coastal destruction become

common symptoms of human recklessness, Samper's painting lives in the paradoxical calm of tides' cyclicity and environmental replenishment—in the neap tide, wrought from the balanced relation of celestial bodies.

Samper's previous series, *Transitions*, *Picture Element*, and *Degrees*—all comprising the larger series *Technology*—portrayed a world reconceived by pixels and iPhone screens, mitigated by a profusion of anti-anxiety spinners. *Atmospheric Layers* actively omits technology's omnipotent presence as it celebrates natural forms, but its process of creation nods to the possibility of balance. For these works, Samper first photographed natural scenes across multiple seasons and locations, then used graphic design techniques to visualize how she wanted colors—vibrant harvest yellows and oranges, soily browns, tidal and airy aquamarines—and shapes to meld in affective natural scenes. She then neglected the screen, moving on to setting oils to linen canvas in a durational and deliberate process, with transparencies taking a minimum of three weeks at a time to dry before the next could be layered atop the others.

Few of these paintings themselves portray destruction. The disruption of the beauty and equilibrium they depict looms just off the canvas—as any portrait celebrating an ongoing life also bears the eventual melancholy of memorial. Transcendent joy and a sober urgency commingle between these layers.

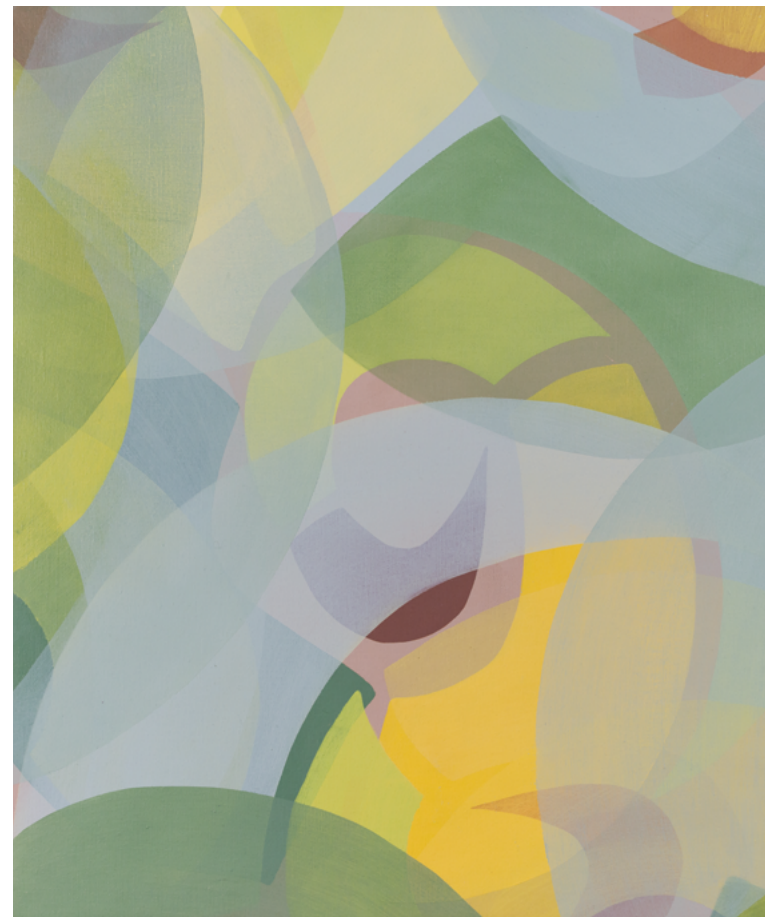
By Moze Halperin

*Moze Halperin is a Brooklyn-based critic and playwright.*

*Continuum*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
52 x 42 inches



*Gentle*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches



*Harvest, 2022*  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches





*Shift*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
54 x 42 inches



*Spring Tide, 2023*  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches



*Rays I*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches



*Breathe II*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
52 x 58 inches



*Neap Tide*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
24 x 20 inches



*Breathe I*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
52 x 58 inches



Patti Samper

*My work is informed by a wide spectrum of sources: from personal to communal, and virtual to spiritual spaces. Within this realm, I incorporate into my paintings an exploration of the relationship between light and matter, color and emotion. I have always been profoundly interested in the intangible and documented effects of technology, climate change and the fragility within these systems. Particularly its effects to our humanity and our environment. My new paintings reflect my ongoing journey into this contemporary experience.*

Patti Samper, born in Bogotá, Colombia, exhibits her paintings throughout the USA and internationally, with works in private collections. Samper is a represented artist member of The Painting Center in New York City, and has her studio in Montclair, New Jersey, USA. Samper earned her BFA in Photography from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts.

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