
WHEN WE LIE AWAKE





Consulate General of Greece
New York

Despina Konstantinides

WHEN WE LIE AWAKE

May 8th through May 22nd, 2018

Opening Reception: Tuesday, May 8th, 6-8pm

Essay by Jennifer Samet, Ph.D.

Consulate General of Greece in New York | 69 East 79th Street | NY | 10075

UNCONCEALMENT: PAINTINGS BY DESPINA KONSTANTINIDES

By Jennifer Samet

Despina Konstantinides's paintings are arrived at, not pre-determined. They don't start with a thing, a place, a season, or a time. This, despite the fact that they are based in the format of landscape painting. Instead, we are brought into the process of their making through their densely textured surfaces and their chromatic resonance. In minimizing the references to specific objecthood, Konstantinides suggests the dissolution of self and ego. Moods and sentiments are created in her work through a harmonizing of directional marks, incised or exposed across the canvases, and the depth and range of her palette: orange, pink, green, blue.

Although her paintings reference vast spaces — the meeting-points of mountain, sky, water — they are not grandiose. They are 60 x 64 inch paintings: large, yet intimate works. Using equally sized canvases connects Konstantinides to artists who work serially: exploring the potential of a single subject, motif, or mode. I think of Morandi's seemingly endless explorations of the same still life objects. Konstantinides has worked this way; several years ago, she made her window seat and the view outside her subject matter across a group of works on paper.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger's articulation of the Greek concept of "Aletheia" or truth as "unconcealment" is a point of reference for Konstantinides. Heidegger proposes an interpretation of truth that is phenomenological and relational. In his text "The Origin of a Work of Art," he investigates the process of artmaking, and how meaning reveals itself in time and in relation to the period. He is distinguishing art from objecthood, and locating "truth" in the unfolding of events. "Unconcealment" takes place in time.

Konstantinides works on paintings over months and years, and her process is subtractive as much as additive. She scrapes down layers of paint, revealing textures of color underneath; they form patterns across the surface. It is an unconcealment that draws us into the experience — rather than the appearance — of nature. In the landscape, our eyes switch back and forth from the vast vistas and small forms, like a blade of grass. The layers in her paintings also draw us experientially into the artist's process.

Her work reminds us of the paradigm shift in the history of landscape painting, when artists in the mid-19th-Century shifted from constructed notions of the landscape to more personalized, experiential depictions. Théodore Rousseau’s “The Forest in Winter at Sunset” (c. 1846-67, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), which the artist worked on for over two decades and never exhibited, was more about the forest as a metaphor for a web of experience, time, and artistic process, than a literal, named place. The American landscape painter Ralph Albert Blakelock made experimental process a major part of his work; he would expose layers of underpainting, and scratch into the surface. His work suggests and manifests light seen through darkness, as opposed to illustrating it. Konstantinides works through a similar kind of material, substance-based process.

The artist Milton Resnick said, “Painting is — when you are together in an internal sense — a correspondence between what you are and what you see. It’s a moment when something is holding together in such a way that it is a universe in itself. It approaches as much completion as it possibly can. Within this is a test and also a judgment upon yourself, your capabilities, your promises, and the part that you play in the world. And nobody else can test that for you.”

Konstantinides’s work establishes a relation between losing oneself in nature, and losing oneself in the process of painting. It is an allowance of the possibility that Resnick suggests: where the very substance of painting can become a universe in itself. It is an aspiration at odds with our contemporary culture — where nameability and full disclosure is prioritized over the more subtle, gentler “unconcealments” that Konstantinides creates in time.

Jennifer Samet, Ph.D., is an art historian and author of the column “Beer with a Painter” in *Hyperallergic*, faculty at the New York Studio School, and director of research at Eric Firestone Gallery.

Stars Hide Your Fires | oil on linen | 60 x 64 inches | 2012-2015



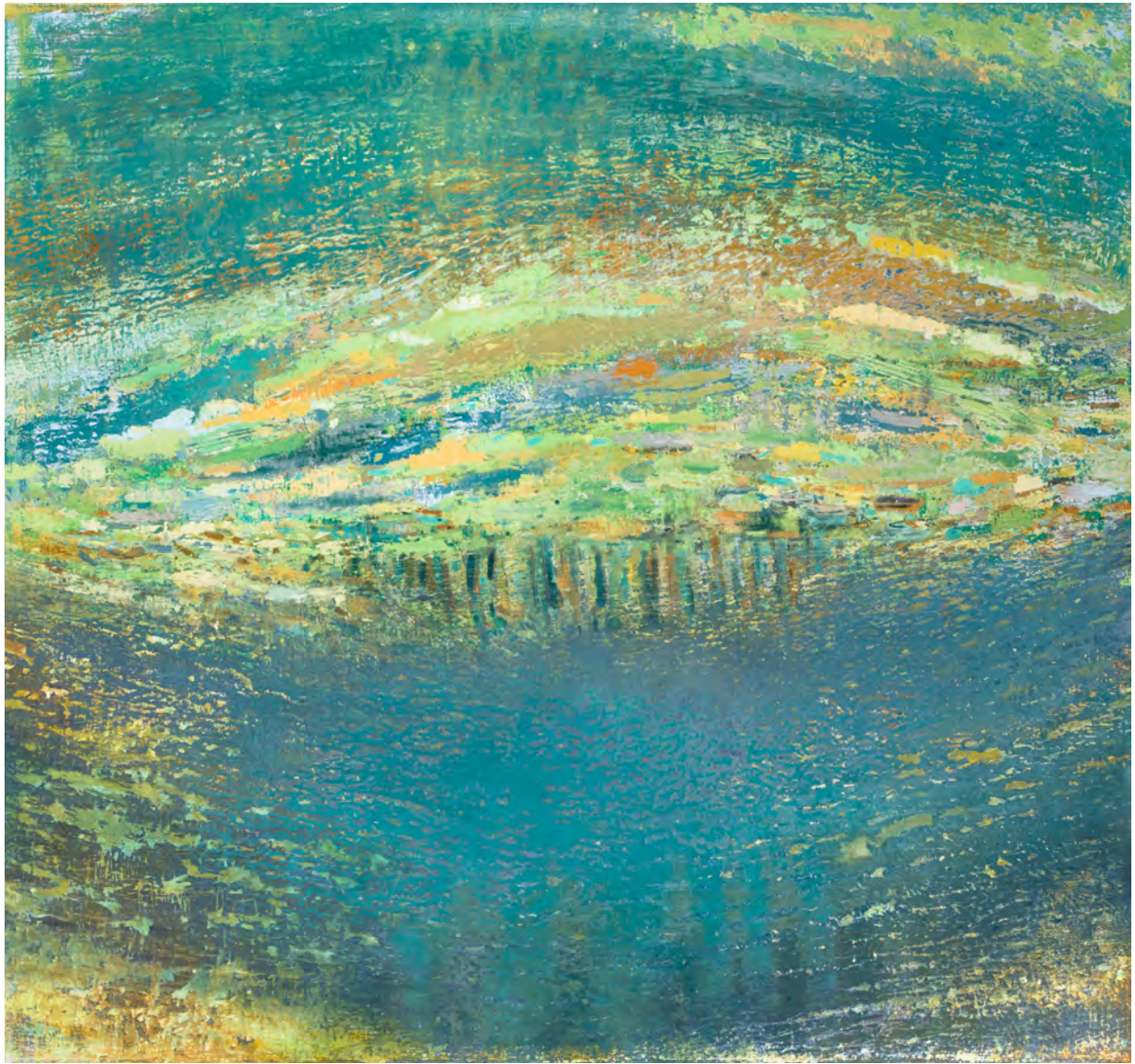
Dissolve Me | oil on linen | 60 x 64 inches | 2015-2017



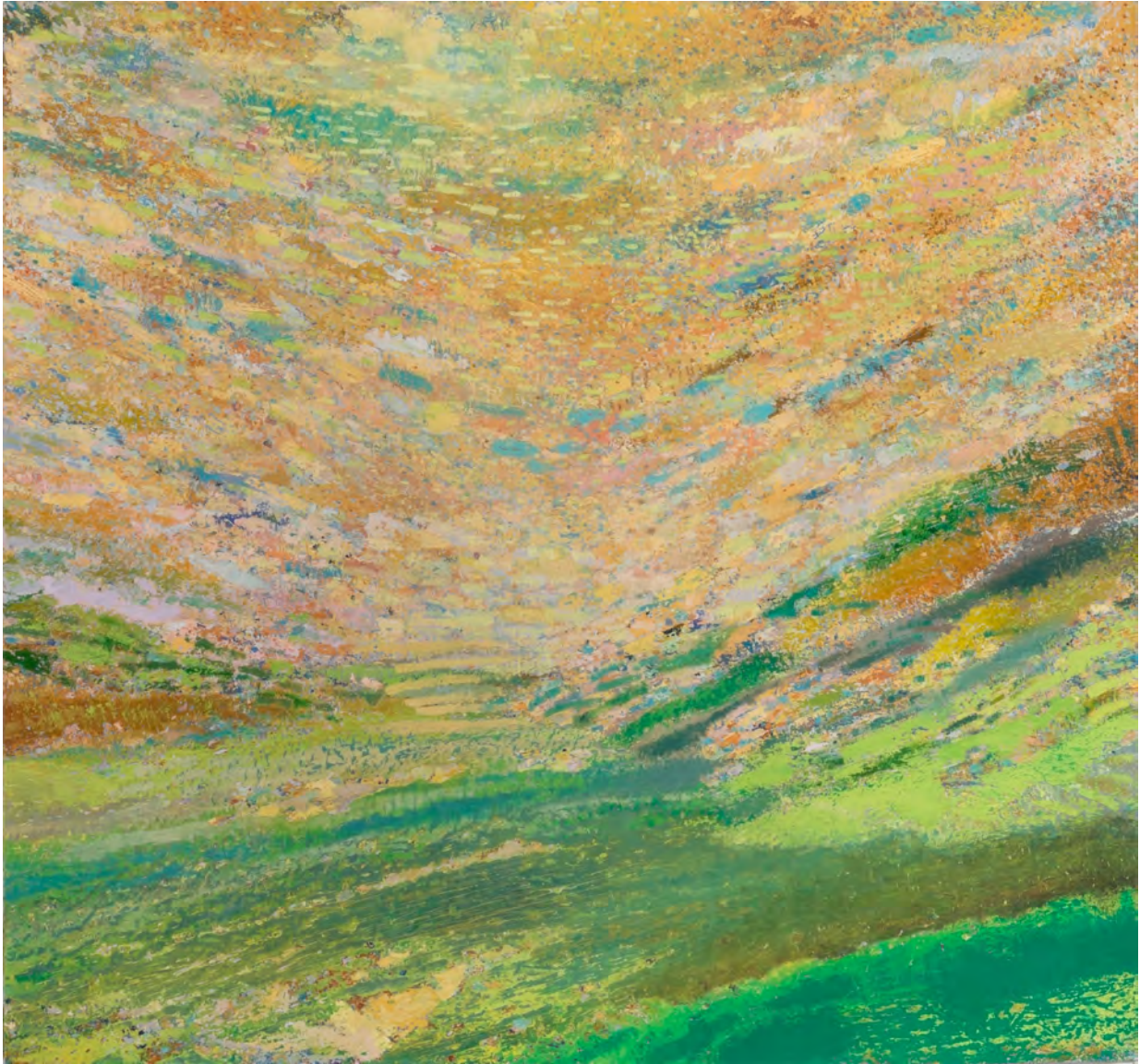
Say Something Back | oil on linen | 60 x 64 inches | 2015-2016



Your Hand In Mine | oil on linen | 60 x 64 inches | 2015-2017



When We Lie Awake | oil on linen | 60 x 64 inches | 2012-2016





Chant | oil on canvas | 10 x 10 inches | 2008-2010



Echo | oil on canvas | 10 x 10 inches | 2008-2011

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the generous support of:
Konstantinos Koutras, Ph.D., *Consul General of Greece in New York*
Spyridoula-Ioanna Zochiou, *Consul of Greece in New York*
Manos Koubarakis, *Former Consul of Greece in New York*
Evangelia Kanellea, *Cultural and Public Affairs Officer at the Consulate General of Greece in New York*

This catalog was printed on the occasion of the exhibition
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New York, NY 10075

FRONT INSIDE COVER: *Your Hand in Mine*, 2015-2017 (detail)
BACK INSIDE COVER: *When We Lie Awake*, 2012-2016 (detail)

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