

Evelyn Twitchell



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Drawn from Nature
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BOWERY GALLERY
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“The tangible and sensational world was still the raw material for the universality which he would create for himself.”

MYRON STOUT ON MONDRIAN

A frozen bird folded over on itself and trapped in an icy gyre of paint, the bittersweet agony of release and restraint, of freedom and denial; a tightly packed seed emerging from a swarm of thick black lines, the original germ for all life; a densely painted horizontal rush of crystalline shards of mossy water, the unstoppable flux of life hooked and suspended for a tense moment. Evelyn Twitchell's paintings, drawings and reliefs — each a menagerie of engaging riddles and idiosyncratic forms — are products of a Thoreau-ean attempt to give form to elusive, skittering, peripheral impressions of natural forces and rhythms like growth, or stagnation. Or silence.

Animal, vegetable and mineral are all drawn from nature, essences tapped at the source — that ‘tangible and sensational world’ just outside our window — and distilled into metaphors oscillating between diminutive and grand (the simple tumbling motion of a climbing weed simultaneously champions the dignity of a reviled garden nuisance and the irrepressible human will). This is not to be confused with the literal act of drawing from nature, though, of course, this basic routine takes place along the way. Rather, these works are a reconstruction after the experience, not a one-to-one response in situ, and exist in a time and space guided entirely by their own very particular rules.

Drawn, erased, redrawn, painted, scraped down, futzed with and honed, Twitchell is constantly refining, because she knows the minute a mark is made, that moment she's trying to fix will shift, wanting to escape and remain indefinable. Highly active surfaces are testament to Twitchell's struggle to corral these fleeting sensations — imbuing the work with a sense of becoming — allowing it to remain still very much alive, active. The work is tended to like plots in a garden, permitted to grow and emerge as much on its own terms as on Twitchell's. The viewer is cast in these unfurling pictorial dramas as participant in the search, not sidelined observer. The final result is more a beautiful living document than something wrapped up and ‘done.’

A noticeable absence of vibrant color might draw quizzical looks for work primarily concerned with elemental forces of nature. However, this is a red herring, as Twitchell's nervy preponderance for black, white and an astonishing range of grays wrings more depth of color than could a swath of bright cadmium yellow. This luminous grayscale feels primal, pre-cognitive, and imbues the works with a kind of milky fragrance one might encounter at the moment of life's (human or otherwise) conception. The work is slowed down, made intimate, accessible, vulnerable. And when Twitchell does set a spot of blunted cerulean or muddled ochre against one of her chalky grays, it grabs attention and is afforded a real gravity of purpose and greater metaphorical oomph.

Twitchell's confident, adept use of line can rightly be considered the heartbeat of these works. They define volume and space; evoke time and distance; map out a restless, engaged thought process; and provide architectural buttressing. Like leading in stained glass windows, these lines snake through the work, setting up dynamic relationships such as hard/soft, fast/slow, and interior/exterior. Follow the trail of one of Twitchell's lines — as it wobbles and lopes, variously increasing and decreasing in girth and opacity — and it becomes clear how such a basic drawing element can contain multitudes.

We look to visual artworks to fill the gap when words fail to express intangible, yet palpable, experiences. Twitchell attempts to translate these blurry-edged moments into hard working, and hard worked, symbols, visual stand-ins for that which is essentially indefinable. She builds up and breaks down forms in a race against time, trying to emulate on paper and canvas experiences which, if truly pinned like a butterfly, would lose their power and grace. It's a conundrum, to be sure. But Twitchell accepts and embraces this challenge to capture while setting free, to define while obfuscating, because, as Myron Stout also observed, “the life of a symbol is in its refusal to become fixed.”

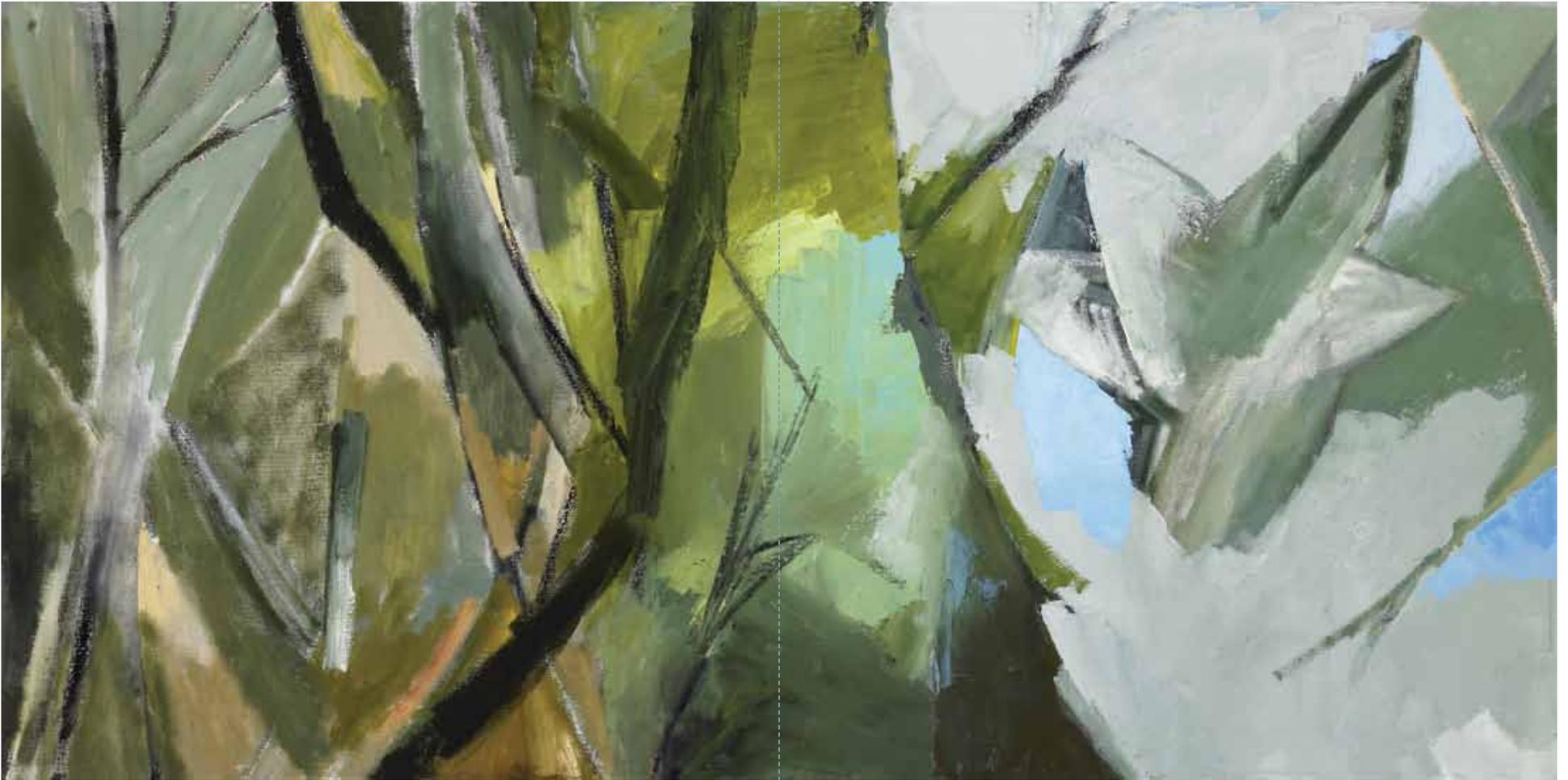
Brice Brown



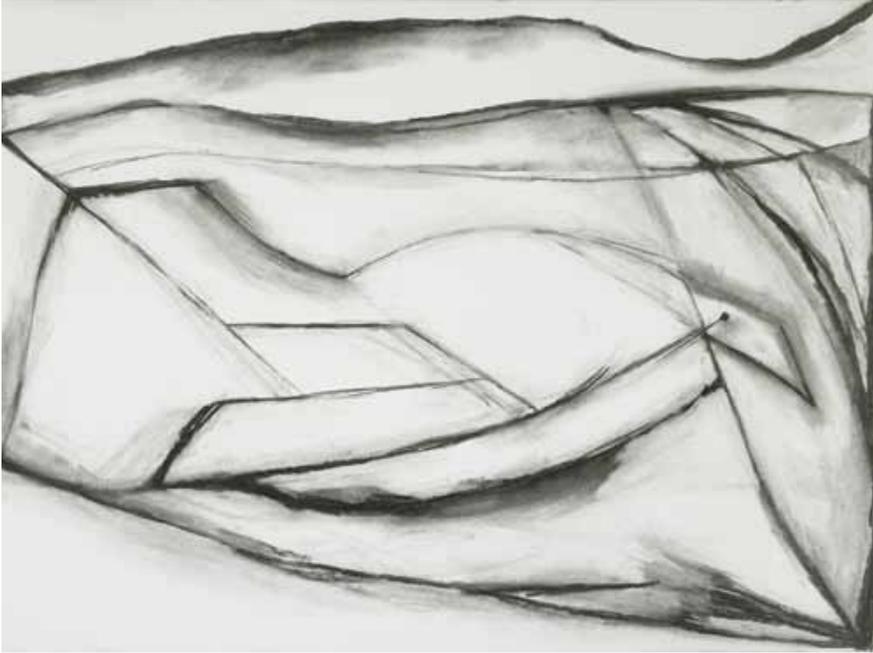
Opening, 2010, charcoal, 30 x 22 inches



River, 2010, oil on canvas, 20 x 18 inches



Earth, River, Sky, 2010, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches



Frozen Bird, 2010, charcoal, 22 x 30 inches



Seed (Yellow), 2009, oil on canvas board, 11 x 14 inches



Weed, 2009, clay/acrylic, 13 x 7 ³/₄ inches



Dying Bird, 2009, oil stick on paper, 13 ¹/₂ x 11 inches



Nest, 2005, oil on canvas, 10 x 10 inches

