



Candy Le Sueur: Reflections at Panepinto Galleries



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Dream pop is all over the year-end top ten lists: blurry, gauzy, beautiful and melancholy, feminine, slow-paced, maybe a little intoxicated. That's been the sound of 2019, and although there aren't all that many Hudson County musicians who play dream pop, there's a remarkable visual analog hanging in Paulus Hook.

Candy Le Sueur's "Reflections" exhibition features abstract expressionist oil paintings that feel like hallucinations. Figuration is dispensed with, in favor of broad washes of color on (usually) large canvases. Everything looks like a beach, or an ocean, or a cloud blurring the horizon line between the beach and the ocean, or a sunrise gracing the surface of the sea. Or perhaps none of it is meant to resemble anything in particular: It's just a play of pigments and curved strokes, committed to the work with wonder and vigor but with no evident malice. No people or animals are depicted or suggested. Life for Le Sueur is but a dream, and her show is a solitary daylight idyll.

It would be inaccurate to call "Reflections" anxiety free. There's turbulence in the gray scribbles of paint that lurk in the clouded corners of her otherwise luminous pieces. If Le Sueur's work is a response to the natural world, these aren't perfect June days she's depicting. Yet the fear of the inhospitable wilderness that drives so much American nature painting is completely absent. This painter is not worried about natural forces. She's floating through them as a placid observer, one animated by candor but willing to drift through scenes of her own invention, taken by the wind like a kite. "Reflections" is, above all, accommodating — a generous bestowal of light. There's not much agitation here, and no discernible argument is getting made. Hers is art that is content to leave the viewer be. It's hard to believe that Le Sueur is from cantankerous, confrontational old Jersey City.

But she is indeed a Hudson County artist and an active one. She's shown her work at [Drawing Rooms](#), the Windows on Columbus, [Novado Gallery](#), the Santorelli Gallery in Hoboken, and other area spaces. "Reflections" is about as far east in town as you can go without splashing into the river: The show occupies the broad white wall spaces of Panepinto Galleries at 70 Hudson St., one of those two squat and squarish buildings on the waterfront boardwalk from which the smell of big money wafts. The members of the Panepinto clan are major players in local real estate: They're responsible for the Marriott by the Grove Street PATH Station, 3 Journal Square, and nearly all of the imposing new glass and concrete residential towers on Columbus Drive; Stefania Panepinto, the operator of the Gallery, is involved in the family business.

Spear Street Capital, the national real estate investment firm that owns 70 Hudson, is listed as one of the sponsors of "Reflections." Some local exhibitions go out of their way to disguise the mercantile nature of the art world. This is not one of those shows.

Panepinto Galleries specializes in work that a visitor might encounter at a Panepinto-made hotel or a building like it: art designed to soothe the jangled nerves of business travelers as they prepares for a meeting. The analgesic quality of Candy Le Sueur's work does put it into that category. These paintings might fit neatly behind the front desk of a skyscraper's atrium — a slice of natural wildness, taken, tamed, and framed by professional buyers. The first floor of 70 Hudson St. is just that sort of corporate space, and the pieces in "Reflections" do assimilate themselves into the tickertape rhythms of their surroundings with unnerving ease. That's not exactly Le Sueur's fault. Because of its inherent ambiguity, abstract expressionism has become the preferred style for purchasers at hotels and financial services companies.

70 Hudson is a glass house, and I don't mean to throw stones at the operation or its aesthetic priorities. The building might be imposing, but the gallery keeps some of the most accommodating — and democratizing — hours in town. It's open to the public every weekday from 9 a.m until 6 p.m.

Like every artist who is good at this style — and this painter certainly is skilled — Le Sueur's canvases have a hypnagogic effect. Some of the wavy lines of paint are short and blunt, others are broad and borderline chaotic, but all of them feel like visual traces left by elegant movements of human hands and wrists, a somatic charm drawing bathers from the shallows into deeper waters. Le Sueur's pieces give the impression that they were each completed during a single lengthy reverie. She carries that sense of unity from piece to piece, and it's particularly impressive when she executes that vision on a large scale. In "Day Dreaming 3," a warm smear of egg-yolk yellow enlivens an otherwise stony gray field; it could be a sunrise over a rocky coast, and it feels as complete a portrait as any landscape photograph might be. Often any sense of horizontality is deliberately lost as strokes swirl every which way. Yet this is not disorienting art. There is something about Le Sueur's work that anchors the viewer: Magnetic north is always discernible. All of these paintings look like places (albeit lonely ones). Sometimes, they're even places in the sky.

The most impressive part of this lovely exhibition is a wall full of haunted watercolors, a departure for the artist, we're told. Stare at these, too, and they're likely take on the appearance of distant shores, glaciers, vast lakes and huge swirly heavens. Yet the flatness of the watercolor medium and the smallness of each paper makes these dream landscapes feel stark, shadowed, and emotionally pained in a way that Le Sueur's oil paintings never suggest. Art that reflects dreams, whether dream pop or dream painting or hallucinatory cinema can evaporate once the audience disengages; dreams after all are usually consequence free. But a few linger well into daylight. These watercolors do. They suggest a way forward for an artist as sure-footed as any in town.