

B E T S Y B A U E R



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M E M O R I A



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BRIDGEWATER/LUSTBERG & BLUMENFELD GALLERY

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L A Y E R E D M E M O R I E S

M U S I C F L O W S A C R O S S T H E P A I N T I N G S O F B E T S Y B A U E R T H E W A Y Y O U H E A R I T I N Y O U R M I N D -
FAINTLY BUT PERSISTENTLY. ITS RHYTHMS ECHO THOSE IN THE LANDSCAPES BELOW. WORDS FLOW ACROSS AS WELL, THE BEAUTIFULLY
SCRIPTED MEMOIRS OF A TUSCAN MAN LIVING IN A VILLAGE CALLED TERRA NUOVA OUTSIDE OF AREZZO IN THE LATE 1700S.
Piero della Francesca trod this land he farmed and Bauer paints, so did Giotto; it graces the backgrounds of many a
pre-Renaissance Italian altarpiece. Bauer's landscapes look like enlarged details from such paintings, but they are
constructed from multiple sources: photographic, pictorial and imaginative. The Italian landscape inspires her, the
Tuscan's words inspire her, as does music playing in the studio. Words, music, and image blend into one another,
gently fused by a layering process that is a metaphor for our own layered existence.

Betsy Bauer travels to Italy every other year to steep herself anew in the art and ambience there. She feels a
connection to the crumbling old walls so many people have passed by over the centuries, and to the land itself. The
vegetation is sparse in her new "Memoria" series landscapes. One can readily count the trees, their leaves, and the
plant sprigs set sparingly in the dry and brown earth. Early 15th century Italian painters depicted similar landscapes,
but something here makes it unsurprising to learn that Bauer lives in the desert outside of Santa Fe. The preciousness
of living matter comes through, and a joyous springiness that probably owes a debt to her early training in animation.
Her skies seem to have an even more mixed heritage. One may think of Jacob van Ruisdael's skies, or the interlocked
dark/light skies of Albert Pinkham Ryder and Marsden Hartley, or of the skies of various Hudson River School painters,
but one's own memories of stacks of distant clouds scudding over the prairie or desert are just as likely to be sparked.

Large botanical specimens of a lotus, a seed pod, a leaf, fern or tree overlaid and dominated her often small
paintings in the past, but the music and calligraphy was legible in the surrounding space. Now the layering is even
more subtle, with some words barely visible through the clouds in *Memoria d'Albero*, and seeming to be scratched into
the earth below. In *Terra di Musica* the musical notation plays off the poplars dotting the hillsides in a perfect integration
of visual and musical rhythms, while word and image unite in *Molto Tranquillo*. Recently a new element has been
introduced, architecture. Italian, of course, it begins the painting. A Palladian colonnade is first drawn onto the panel
over which a landscape, and, in the instance of *Tempio di Virtù*, another building is painted. Here Bauer layers the present
(in the form of landscape views drawn or photographed on the spot) onto the past, which shows through the multiple
oil glazes out of which she builds the painting, like a ghost of Italy's glorious architectural past.

Bauer's glazing process lends an old master quality to her paintings which she reinforces by building the
glaze layers up into darkness at the edges and then surrounding the paintings in wide, hand craquelure-varnished frames
which seem aged. One must shake free of appearances and focus on the post-collage simultaneity of the overlays to
remember that this work is very much of today. Bauer is telling us through these paintings that in the third millennium
we are facing uncharted territory with only our memories of the past to guide us.

April Kingsley

April Kingsley is an independent art critic and curator in New York City.