

MATTHIAS ALFEN PORCELAIN WAR SHELBURNE'S NEW PERRY CENTER RESIDENCIES

art

New England

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025
\$6.95 US
\$8.95 CANADA



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(14) Ilana Manolson, *Heart Throb*, acrylic on Yupo, 30 x 40". Photo: Will Howcroft. (16) Handmade "Desi Boots" by Lauren Brinkers. Photos: Stephan Sagmiller. (20) View of gathering circle and north façade, Perry Center for Native American Art at Shelburne Museum. Image: Annum Architects. (24) Hans Memling (Netherlandish) 1430/40–1494, *Portrait of a Man in a Black Cap*, c.1470–75, oil on panel, 8 1/2 x 7 3/4". Courtesy of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Gift of Aso O. Tavitian Foundation. (32) Installation view of *Venice Wallpaper; Courtyard seen through Drapery*, ca. 1840 at *The Art of French Wallpaper Design* at RISD. Courtesy of Mary B. Jackson Fund. RISD Museum, Providence, RI. (38) Artist Matthias Alfen at his studio in Stamford, CT. Photo: Geraldine Marcenyac.

By Stacy Grossman

Ilana Manolson

On a crisp fall day, this writer toured the studio space of painter, printmaker and naturalist, Ilana Manolson. Manolson's work is on display at the Lucy Lacoste Gallery in Concord, MA, through January 12 in the exhibition, *Sisters, Rocks and Roots*, which also showcases the work of the painter's sister, ceramicist Frith Bail. Manolson's studio is perched on the bank of the Assabet River. The artist refers to her studio as "landed and lucky" because of its idyllic setting. The workspace has high ceilings and is flooded with natural light from skylights above and glazing throughout. The core of the space is occupied by two large tables—one that hosts a multitude of finished works and the other set up for creating new ones. It also boasts track lighting, mini splits for controlled temperatures, and ingenious storage that makes the studio feel clean and orderly. While there, Manolson demonstrated her painting process, which relies on nature for visual inspiration. On this day, milkweed was the muse. The artist explained that exploring nature is both vital to who she is and the work she creates. Manolson grew up in Montreal near the Laurentian Mountains, which became a playground for her and her sister. "We marched through swamps and woods and collected stuff. We had the luxury to look closely at nature and ask what's special, what's changed, what's constant, where is the rhythm in that? And this exploration is brought into our work." Manolson paints with acrylic on Yupo—a canvas made of polypropylene. As she took a paddle brush and spread water on the Yupo surface and then spread a dark shade of greyish blue pigment on top of the water, the commingling fluids began to shift and move. In one area it beaded, in another it pooled, and in yet another area the amalgamation mimicked wave-like patterns. "The paint itself has a movement and a motion and I'm working on the edge of realism and abstraction," she shared. Keenly attentive to

the ebb and flow, Manolson moves the pigment with her brush, referring to the process as a "call and response" activity in which she relies on her intimate understanding of the natural world and her creative intuition to move and shape the image. "As I paint, I am always inspired by the movement and change, as in nature, and by how things are never quite what they seem. I am also aware of what is in the negative space. Like Asian art, what's not there speaks as loudly as what is there."

A work titled *Hunter* is a masterful example of the push and pull of realism and abstraction. It's a visual stunner, with two sweeping, sinuous brush strokes comprising most of the canvas space. There is a large s-curve of cerulean and



Above, from left: *Hunter*, 2024, acrylic on Yupo, 60 x 24". *Is and Of IX*, 2024, acrylic on Yupo, 9 x 12". Photos: Will Howcroft. Top: A portrait of Ilana Manolson at her studio by Stacy Grossman.

green gold on the top half of the work, with a fish-like squiggle of ochre swimming in the primordial hues. Underneath is a circular swirl of cyan. Grey masses with angular edges punctuate the cyan orb indicating boulders or rocks and spongy applications of viridian and green gold signify mossy plant life that organically connect the sweeping, gestural undulations. The negative or white space is equally dynamic. As it pokes through the brushwork, it serves to frame and anchor the pigmented sections. Manolson's technique is on full display here, the brushwork feels bold and dynamic, intimating, perhaps, the symbiosis between man and nature. Yet the nuanced asymmetry defined by painterly strokes that spill



and are cut off on the top right half of the canvas feels precarious, suggesting vulnerability to this partnership.

A series of smaller scale works displayed throughout the studio titled "Is and Of" offer a more explicit exploration between humanity and nature. At first glance the series feels whimsical with limbs emerging from a variety of flora. *Is and Of XII*, for example, is a composition with balletic legs spilling out of a wash of ethereal, seafoam green and pillowy flowers. It feels visually pleasant yet the limbs

are blood red, and there's an enigmatic blood-stained globule floating near one knee. Fiery sparks climb up the base of the other limb. In *Is and Of VII* the tenuous dynamic between man and nature is clearer. Here we see a pair of legs holding up a craggy amalgamation of muddy green stems, leaves, and blooms—the weight is heavy, burdensome. In *Is and Of IX*, nature is volcanic, erupting bloody limbs. It feels visually akin to the expulsion from Eden. In

her artist's statement Manolson writes, "Just as rivers flow into lakes and fires ravage forests, my work operates in both the additive and subtractive... I document the growth and loss within a landscape." In an age of global warming, these words and images feel profoundly prescient.

Stacy Grossman is an art historian and writer based outside of Boston and is particularly interested in art and education. In addition to writing, she has worked in museums, public schools and other non-profits developing art curriculum.

manolson.com

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Duxbury Art Association
Winter Juried Show

February 2 through April 19, 2025
Reception: February 16, 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Irena Roman, *Wayne*, transparent watercolor
(Best in Show 2024)



Steve Branfman: Fifty Years
Above the Wheel

February 16 through May 5, 2025
Reception: February 16, 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Steve Branfman, *Winter Landscape*
Saturdays, 2023



Raku from the Art Complex
Museum Collection

February 2 through April 19, 2025
Reception: February 16, 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Tanaka Chojiro, *Wild Fox Tea Bowl*

WOMAN AS ARTIST /
WOMAN AS SUBJECT

NOVEMBER 15 – DECEMBER 6
JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 14

Henri Matisse, *K2* from *Dessins: Thèmes et Variations*, 1942, lithograph, 12 1/2 x 9 in. (detail).
Permanent Collection, Chapel Art Center

Alva de Mars Megan Chapel Art Center

GALLERY HOURS

Tues. through Fri. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Thurs. until 7 p.m.

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