



**DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT LINES**

**Merion Estes**

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A small survey of Merion Estes paintings dating from 2011 to 2017 brings into focus the many influences that have driven her practice for over fifty years. For Estes Feminism in the late 1960's and early 1970's allowed for a radical reappraisal and restoration of painting's power to transform consciousness through the embrace of ideas and content beyond questions of pure form without abandoning formal experimentation. In the 1980's when painting witnessed a significant return to the lush materiality and expressive potentials of the medium with an emphasis on allegory, myth, history, and narrative, she began exploring landscape through organic forms and floral patterns. Scrutinizing the intersections of nature and culture, her paintings of that period "worked at the edges of abstraction and representation," an approach amplified by her more recent mixed media paintings on pre-printed decorative fabric bases. Recalling Sigmar Polke's use of artistic conventions, styles, and languages to force a reckoning of the mass produced with painterly gesture, Estes' intermingling of decorative manufactured designs with fanciful renditions of organic forms and the use of collaged photographs equally interrogate the places of artists and nature in an increasingly simulated and dystopian world. With a wide repertoire of painting techniques and inventive use of collage from diverse sources such as Chinese calendars, *National Geographics*, and ethnic fabrics, she dives deep beyond surfaces to provoke a heated dialogue about the intersection of personal feminine creativity, beauty, consumerism, and global ecological and political concerns. As Estes exploits its uniquely mimetic qualities, she reveals that paint can also be descriptive of destructive processes, metaphorically displacing the presumption of the immortality of natural beauty with the notion that nature is endangered. Via a full range of painterly effects – swirling mists of spray paint, splatters, drips, transparent overlays, gestural passages – an encounter with nature is transformed into apocalyptic floods, killer storms, toxic pollution, nuclear catastrophes, and fires. Art references abound: Matisse-shaped leaves sink decaying into a miasma; Japanese woodcuts are echoed in wave imagery and flocks of birds; Eastern and African motifs recall the importance of light and meditative spirituality across cultures. These allusions remind us that artists have been visionaries connecting us to nature and the cosmos since the beginning of life on earth.

Appreciating these paintings requires embracing a paradox, however: they are rapturously beautiful, employing dazzling aesthetics as they describe horrific events. Color can be vivid, bold, prismatic, glowing, and often subtly layered in absorbing, sensuous tonalities. Compositions are dynamic and innovative, swirling, undulating, and seducing. Natural forms enchant and delight in their endless shapes and characters. They simultaneously provoke, confound, and fascinate in a way that is nothing less than sublime, as she situates her viewers on the precarious brink of environmental collapse and annihilation. For Estes, however, the beautiful is co-existent with the sublime and ultimately conducive to preservation, reminding us of Elaine Scarry's statement that beauty "places requirements on us for attending to the aliveness . . . or quasi aliveness of our world, and for entering into its protection." These extraordinary paintings compel us to look and look again, keeping alive the hope that such beauty will bring us to our senses.

—CONSTANCE MALLINSON



*Bayou Blues* (2011)

fabric collage, acrylic, photo transfers on canvas • 53" x 139"



*Smithereens* (2012)

fabric collage, acrylic, photo transfers on fabric • 54" x 72.5"

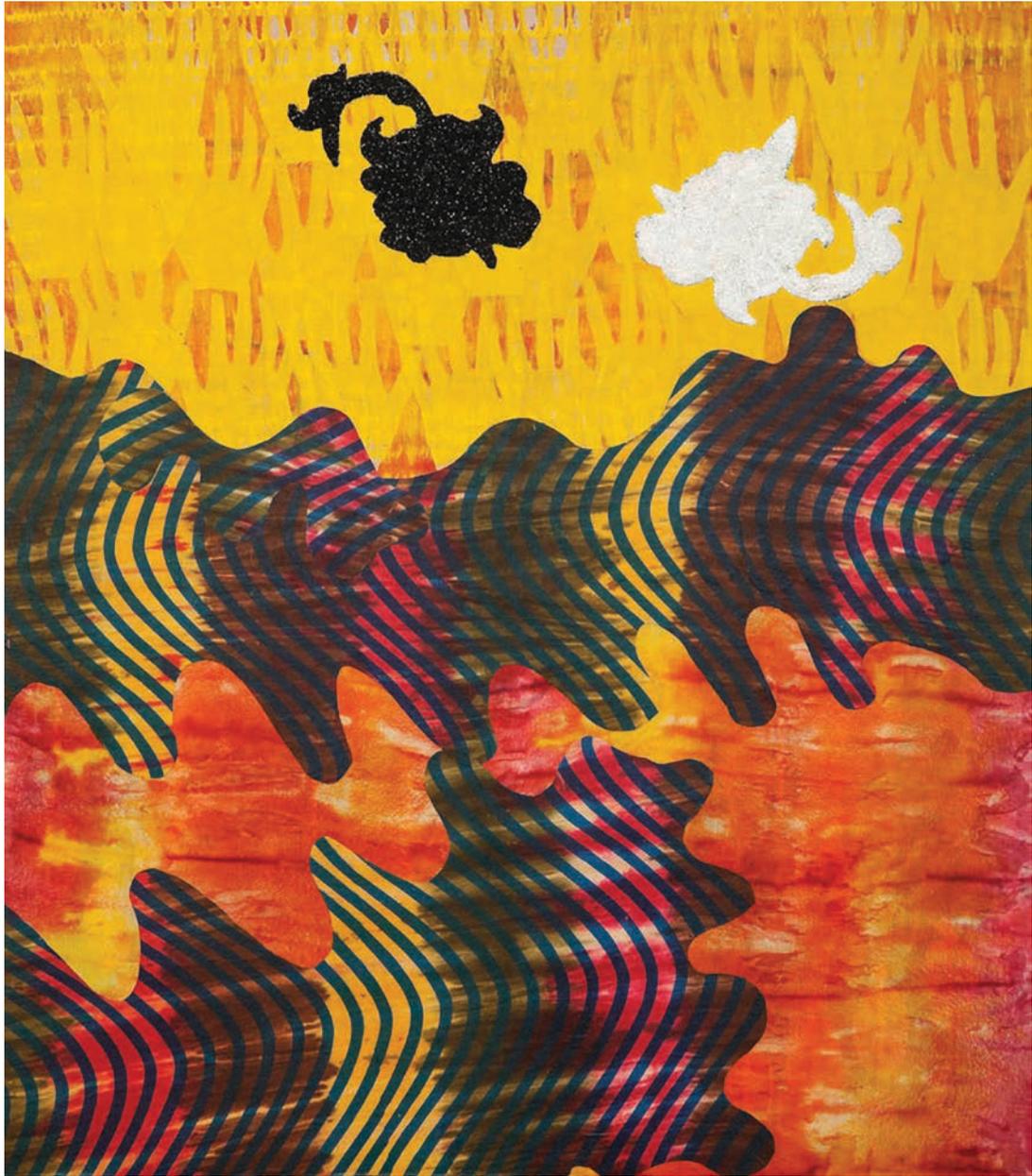


*Melancholia* (2012)

fabric collage, acrylic and spray paint on fabric • 58" x 81"



*Desolation Row* (2013)  
fabric collage, acrylic on fabric • 63" x 80"

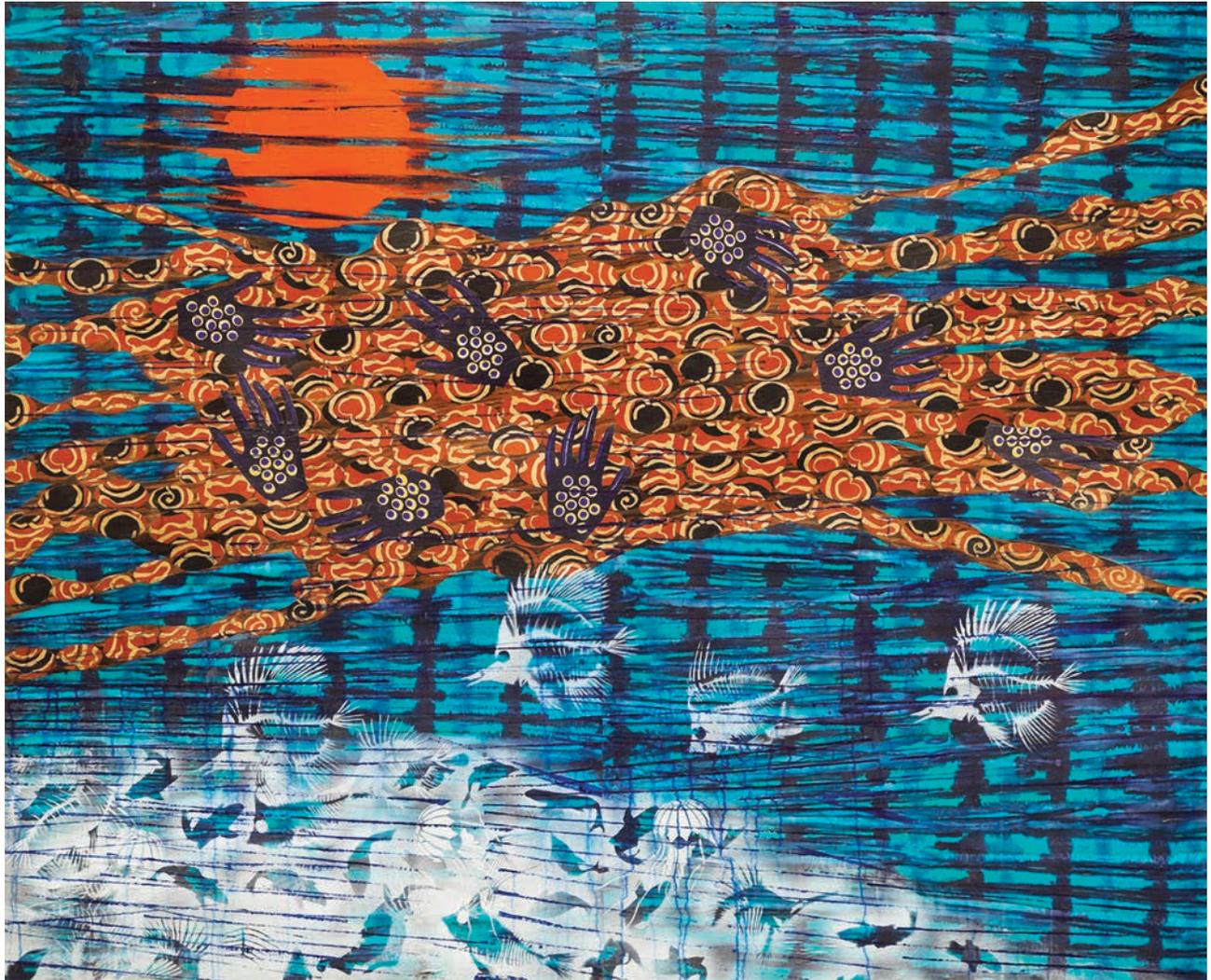


*Black and White* (2015)  
fabric collage, acrylic and glitter on fabric • 48" x 42"



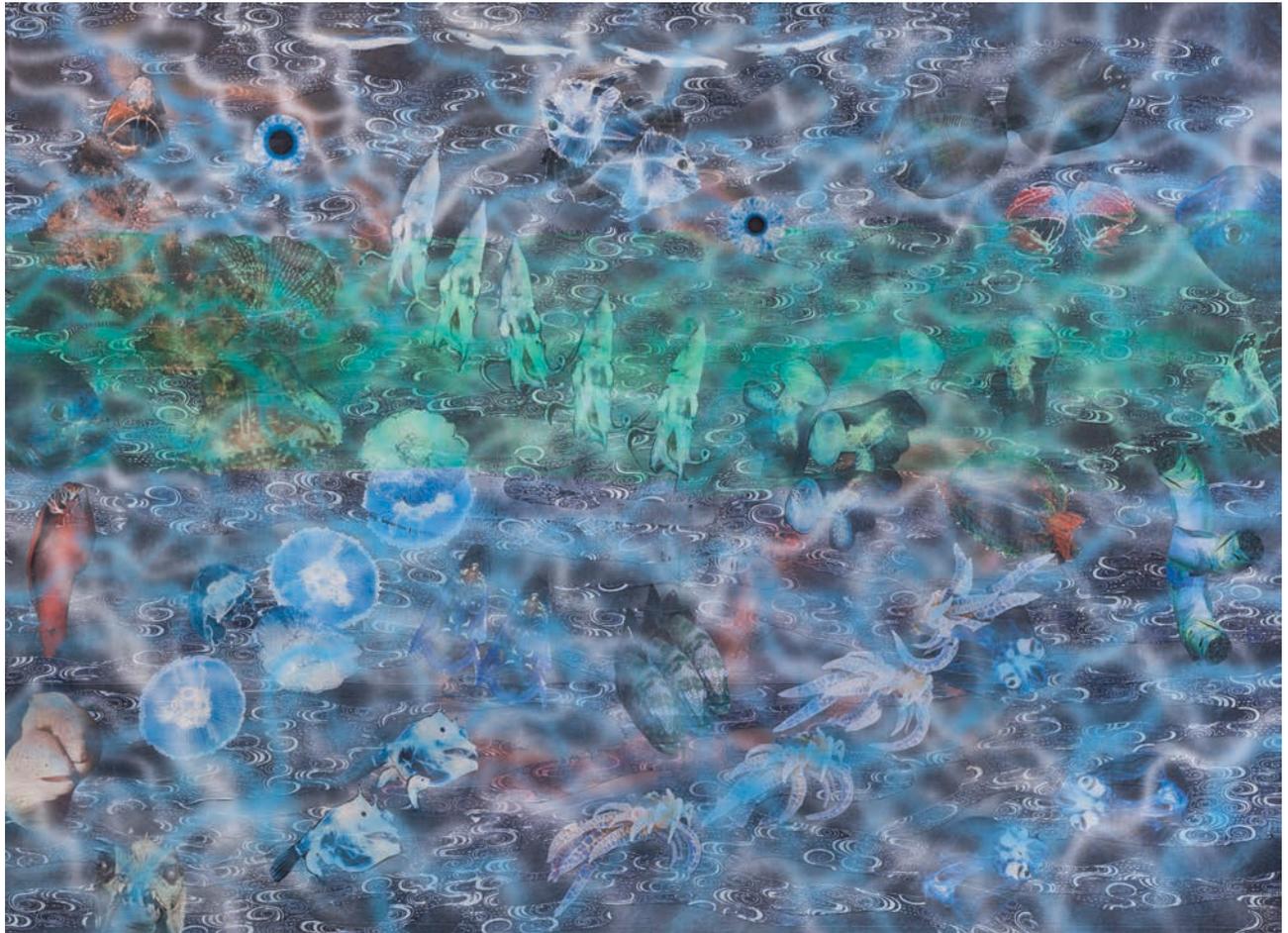
*Yellow River* (2015)

fabric collage, acrylic and glitter on fabric • 62" x 76"



*Negative Spaces* (2015)

fabric collage, acrylic and spray paint on fabric • 60" x 73"



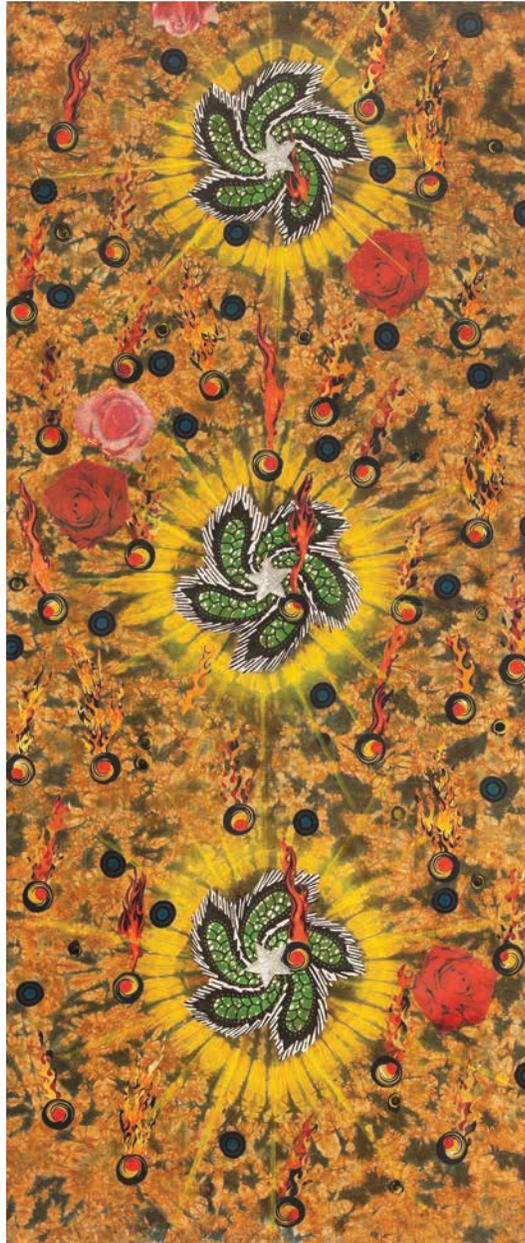
*Cautionary Tale* (2015)

fabric collage, photo transfers and spray paint on fabric • 61" x 84"



*The Politicians* (2016)

fabric collage, acrylic and photo transfers on fabric • 70" x 59"



*High Noon* (2016)

fabric collage, acrylic, glass jewels and photo transfers on fabric • 73" x 32"



*Drink Me* (2016)

fabric collage, acrylic, photo transfers and spray paint on fabric • 60" x 87"



*Chemical Falls* (2016)

fabric collage and spray paint on canvas • 73" x 32"



*Black Star* (2016)

fabric collage, acrylic, photo transfers and spray paint on fabric • 61" x 87"



*Pink Power* (2017)

fabric collage, acrylic and photo transfers on canvas • 48" x 75.5"



*Radioactive Sea* (2017)  
fabric collage, acrylic and spray paint on canvas • 49" x 76"



*Source Code* (2017)

fabric collage, photo transfers, spray paint and plastic dots on canvas • 54" x 72"



*The Invasion* (2017)

fabric collage, acrylic on canvas • 60" X 74.5"

## Selected Exhibitions

### EDUCATION

- 1972 MFA - University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado  
1970 BFA - University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico

### AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2017 New York Foundation for the Arts, Murray Reich Distinguished Artist Award  
2015 AICA-USA (National Art Critics) Finalist for best show of 2012 in an alternative space:  
*Un-Natural* at the Municipal Gallery at Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles, CA  
2007 July Residency, Santa Fe Art Institute, Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant  
1996 Artist Fellowship, J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for Visual Arts

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Ten Year Survey*. Craft and Folk Art Museum, curated by Howard Fox  
2018 *The Feminine Sublime*. Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, CA  
2017 *Dispatches from the Frontlines*. CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (October)  
2017 *Lost Horizons and More*. CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
2015 *Dystopia*. CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
2012 *Un-Natural*. Municipal Art Gallery at Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles, CA, with Mallinson, Burnes The and Adams, curated by Scott Canty  
2012 *Paintings and Works on Paper*. David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
2011 *Lost Horizons and More*. David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
2009 *Merion Estes: Lost Horizons*. Gallerie Anais, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA (catalogue essay by Betty Brown)  
2008 *In the Garden: The Art of Merion Estes*. Biola University Art Gallery, La Mirada, CA  
2007 *Merion Estes: Recent Paintings*. Cardwell Jimmerson Gallery, Culver City, CA  
2006 *A Sea of Possibilities: Works by Merion Estes 1971-2006*. Pomona College Museum of Art, Pomona, CA, curated by Rebecca McGrew (catalogue)  
2005 *Contemporary Soliloquies on the Natural World: Karen Carson, Merion Estes, Constance Mallinson, Margaret Nielsen, Takako Yamaguchi*. USC Fisher Galleries, Los Angeles, CA, curated by Max Schultz (catalogue)  
2001 *Merion Estes, Paintings*. Irvine Fine Arts Center, Irvine, CA, curated by Carl Berg

1998 *Subversive Pleasures*. Curated by Carl Berg Remba Gallery, West Hollywood, CA (catalogue essay by Michael Duncan)

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *The Feminine Sublime*. Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, CA
- 2017 *Hot Time, Summer in the City*. CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2016 *Summer Show*. CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2016 *Urban Nature*. Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, curated by Constance Mallinson
- 2015 *XX Redux*. Chapman University Gallery, Orange, CA, curated by Nancy Buchanan (catalogue)
- 2015 *Art and the Environment*. LAX Exhibition Space, curated by Jay Belolli
- 2013 *Dangerous Beauties*. Stuart Haaga Gallery, Descanso Gardens, CA, curated by John O'Brien
- 2012 *The Nature of Things*. Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- 2010 *Urbanature*. Curated by Constance Mallinson (online journal *Times Quotidian*)
- 2011 *Platform: Los Angeles in the 70s*. David Richard Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA, Art Fair
- 2011 *Painting Per Se: Los Angeles Paintings from the Seventies*. David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico, curated by Peter Frank and David Eicholtz
- 2011 *AKA Zen*. David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 2009 *Rant*. Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, CA, curated by Ryan and Dan Callis
- 2007 *Women Artists of Southern California: Then and Now*. Track 16 Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA (catalogue)
- 2006 *Plex*. The Brewery Annex, Los Angeles, curated by Noel Korten
- 2003 *LAPD*. Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, curated by Michael Duncan
- 2002 *Post Cool*. San Jose Art Museum, San Jose, CA, curated by Michael Duncan; Traveled to Otis College of Art, Los Angeles, 2004
- 2002 *Hand-painted*. Irvine Fine Arts Center, Irvine, CA, curated by Carl Berg
- 2001 *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Occidental College Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, curated by Michael Duncan
- 2001 *Cross-Pollination*. Holland Tunnel, Brooklyn, NY, curated by Susan Joyce Organica; Coleman Gallery, West Hollywood, CA
- 2000 *Cosmic Dermis*. Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, curated by Gordon Haines

MERION ESTES

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*Dispatches from the Front Lines*

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Essay © 2017 Constance Mallinson

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