



JONI PIENKOWSKI

Landscape: Another Dimension

January 17–March 8, 2014

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

CENTER
FOR THE
ARTS
AT VIRGINIA TECH

In a remarkable career spanning more than five decades, Joni Pienkowski has delved into representing the world around her, both visible and invisible, in an artistic practice that has encompassed a range of expressive forms. From her earliest years as a young child seated at a small table in the corner of her father's rural grocery store, Pienkowski pursued drawing and painting with an intensity and motivation that resulted in an exceptional facility with both mediums and a prolific oeuvre. Traversing the spectrum of what painting can be, Pienkowski has freely

LANDSCAPE :

incorporated drawing and calligraphic forms into her painting practice, worked with a variety of materials and techniques, and has excelled in creating works within the traditions of both realism and abstraction. The trajectory of her career has been and continues to be propelled by an ineluctable calling to render beauty, poetry, and ideas into visual form.

This exhibition presents a selection of Pienkowski's current abstract paintings produced primarily from the last two years, on birch panel with oil, acrylic, charcoal, graphite, and Prismacolor pencil.

Steeped in a rich palette of earth tones, highlighted with dashes of burnt oranges, yellows, and whites, Pienkowski's paintings evoke the poetic power and life force of nature. Imbued with a nascent, yet potent energy, wisps of pencil, pen, and ink spontaneously extend, curl, dance, and retreat over the picture plane.

Abstract forms alternately emerging out of the rich grain of the wood surface or tentatively anchored in swaths of pigment, buoyantly jostle with each other, seemingly poised to break free. These works capture an elemental dynamism—crystallized in latent, almost expectant, but universal moments.

Drawing from a depth of sources ranging from literature and art history to the sciences, Pienkowski invests her paintings with an array of allusions. References to biology and the forces of nature abound with implications that are both poetic and philosophical. The titles *Leaving Seeds*, *Thermal Emergence*, and *Seed Journey* suggest such natural phenomena as pollination and gestation—vibrant, yet largely unseen elements of field and woodland ecosystems. The influence of Pienkowski's husband, an entomologist, is especially significant here, having introduced her to new ways of

Front Cover:

Text and Translations, 2013

Detail

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch

32 x 80

observing the terrain around her. "He made me aware," she said, "of the vast and stunning world of insects... All undreamed of color! Patterns! Texture! ... All on the move...I have examined the flora and fauna of my habitat and others up close—then I magnify, fragment, reconstruct, imagine..."¹

Such intimations of the teeming, often overlooked world thriving in the ecosystem of the landscape provide not only a formal starting point in terms of form, color, and imagery for Pienkowski's abstract compositions, but also provide fertile ground for a wealth of ideas. A fascination with the forces of

nature and how everything moves, grows, changes, and is in the process of becoming, forms the catalyst and thematic foundation of the artist's work.

In *Thermal Emergence* (2012) a concentration of fiery yellows in one section coalesce then gush forward, transitioning in the next section into a flow of greens, whites, and floating black forms. These, in turn, surge upwards in the last section into a radiant amalgam of whites anchored by blacks from which burnished browns and golden yellows streak upwards. The painting is alive with movement as the imagery seems to be carried forth by gusts of wind, or, from one

Another Dimension



section to another, seems to morph from one state into another.

Such states of transition, concepts of transformation, and the ongoing complexities of change are conveyed by the artist not only through exuberant splashes of paint, fluid lines, and floating forms, but with many of the paintings' titles, such as *Gail Shredding* (2012) and *Wind Blown Answers* (2010), which suggest wind and the idea of movement carrying things from one place to another. "Wind changes directions. It determines where the seeds land," said Pienkowski.² This metaphoric reference to change, germination, and renewal underscores Pienkowski's fascination with and fervent belief in the regenerative power of nature, one that she conveys in her lyrical paintings with joyful whimsy and exhilaration.

In a sense perhaps, these paintings seek to represent what we ultimately can't really apprehend or see—the dynamic forces of creation. It is these phenomena—the processes of pollination, germination, gestation, growth, change, and renewal—fascinating, yet ultimately incomprehensible concepts—that Pienkowski's abstract paintings depict and invite us to contemplate.

Margo Ann Crutchfield
Curator at Large
Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech



Thermal Emergence, 2012
Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18



Intrusions, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
36 x 40

Works in the Exhibition

Dimensions in inches

All works collection of the artist

Text and Translations, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
32 x 80

Intrusions, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
36 x 40

Dem Bones, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 96 quadriptych
Each panel 80 x 24

Cocoons and Escapes, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
24 x 36

Windrow, 2013

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 24

Seed Journey, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Meeting: The Seed Winds, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Turtle Pots & Predators, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 36

Here to There, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Cicada's Last Dance, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 26

Assimilating, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Thermal Emergence, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Wind Blown Answers, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

Leaving Seeds, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 24

Gale Shredding, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 32

Three Songs, 2012

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 24

Blowin' in the Wind, 2010

Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
30 x 80



Seed Journey, 2012
Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 18

About the Artist

Born in Stoughton, Wis.
Lives in Blacksburg, Va.

B.S., Art Education, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., 1959

M.S., Fine Art, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., 1961

Joni Pienkowski has exhibited her work in more than 130 one-person exhibitions at museums and galleries throughout the United States, including the Smithsonian Institution, Butler Institute of American Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Taubman Museum, and 13 colleges and universities, as well as at B. R. Kornblatt and Franz-Bader Galleries in Washington, D.C. Her work is included in numerous public and private collections, including the Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wis.; Philip Morris U.S.A., Richmond, Va.; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va.; American Broadcasting Co., Washington, D.C.; Georgetown University Self-Portrait Collection, Washington, D.C.; University of Richmond Museum, Richmond, Va.; and Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va; among others. Among the numerous commissions of her work are those at the University of Virginia Hospital, Charlottesville; TRW Inc., Fairfax, Va.; and Squires Student Center and Wallace Hall Atrium at Virginia Tech.

Pienkowski is represented by Robert Miller Gallery in Blacksburg, Va.

Endnotes

- ¹ Joni Pienkowski quoted in *Paradox at one Elbow - Works from 1950 1990* (Clifton Forge, Va.: Alleghany Highlands Arts and Crafts Center, 1991). Unpaginated.
- ² Joni Pienkowski in conversation with the curator in the artist's studio, December 15, 2013.



Gale Shredding, 2012
Oil, acrylic, Prismacolor, charcoal, and graphite on birch
80 x 32

Dimensions in inches



All works collection of the artist

Photography by Sarah Tyler Miller