

## Articulating Transience

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The Chinese-Japanese equivalent for the word “nature” properly connotes something like “being so from out of itself.” Similarly the ancient Hebrew word Ein Sof can be translated as “The Endless One” and otherwise translated as “Nothingness Without End.” Nature, being, nothingness, transcendence - these are themes that resonant most strongly with the paintings of Helka Immonen. For several years, Helka Immonen has been creating shimmering, abstract oil paintings that use evocative, romantic colors to convey a sense of spirituality. The legacies of history are riddled throughout her work from the Italian Frescoes of Domenico di Michelino to the Suprematist art of Malevich to the color fields of Mark Rothko. The intense, perceptual effect of her work allows for contemplation; revealing itself as thin veils of layered pigment. Concentrated and expansive, her work employs a soft geometry on a perfect square format. Her works symbolically present simple, yet extraordinarily powerful thoughts and feelings.

When Kasimir Malevich founded Suprematism in 1915 he sought an art of ultimate reduction. Working within a hard-edge geometric lexicon, his revolutionary technique enabled him to construct images that had no reference at all to reality. Lines, rectangles, and squares were offset at diagonals creating compositions that shared an affinity with the mental processes of analysis, reflection, and the formation of thought. Mark Rothko began painting his mature color field paintings in the late 1950s, creating large monochromatic rectangles that seemed to hover in a floating space. He wanted his work to evoke transcendent emotional states such as ecstasy, joy, and doom. Helka Immonen draws from this legacy without a hard edge articulation of forms in space or the heroic grandstanding of Abstract Expressionism. Rather, her sensuous, ovoid forms seem to slip in and out of grasp, veiled between curtains of transparency. In this sense, there is a perceptual barrier that exists between the viewer and the object of our desire. This removal of objectivity allows us to contemplate the “image” as a sign of transcendence, one that supercedes materiality. Her deft skill and beautiful use of aerial or atmospheric interference creates a dazzling affect. This affect, which Leonardo called “the perspective of disappearance,” tends to make objects seem to take on a blue-gray middle value as they increase in distance. Yet with Immonen’s work there is no background/foreground relationship, rather the image disappears within the same breadth that it is recognized. This is pure abstract painting.

A particularly striking work, *Island 2*, contains a pink vertical band that rests atop a field of greenish yellow. Within the green field is a yellow-orange ovoid shape that dissipates into the surrounding field. The pastel-like colors glisten in an incredibly refulgent manner. As the central yellow form disappears into nothingness we are mystified by the transience of this quiet moment. Immonen’s technique is incredibly mature and evocative. It requires that we slow down our hyper-mediated vision to focus on quiet moments of heightened sensory perception. She comments, “after staying in a residence in Florence, Italy and seeing the frescoes in churches and monasteries, I absorbed a new method to paint. I started to use softer, polychromatic areas of colors and construct the painting by adding several thin layers of color on the canvas. I wanted the underlying layers of colors to be visible,

to create surfaces of transparent colors. The pure and human spiritual content of the frescoes affected me as well. I began to express my inner feelings through abstract forms and colors.”

By isolating our experience of formal events on the picture plane she creates a space of ultimate contemplation. Edmund Husserl first introduced this methodology of isolating or “bracketing” experiences in 1906. By bracketing an experience we reserve our initial judgments, previous encounters, and ethical considerations as a priori. Instead, Husserl suggested the exclusion from consideration of everything that is transcendent and anything else derived via scientific or logical inference; and instead focus only on what was immediately presented to one’s consciousness. Perhaps more than any other image, *Island* captures the

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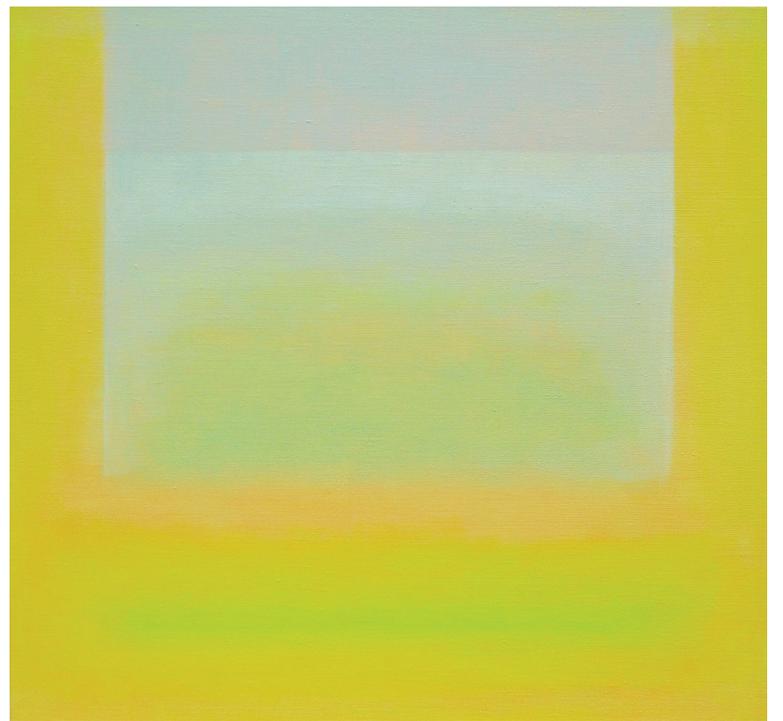
Zen-like epistemological notion of Husserl’s thinking. Immonen relates, “The influences of visual stimuli are filtered through my personal feelings and experiences, whether it concerns the content, colors, composition or space of the painting.”

Another groundbreaking work in her oeuvre is titled *Oasis*. This work takes an almost literal interpretation of painting as window. Here a yellow-green U-shape brackets a rectangle of pale blues, pink, and light green. The bottom edge of the rectangle vanishes into the yellow expanse. This editing gesture is self-reflexive. Here Immonen simultaneously makes a mark that both affirms and denies material existence. The rectangle in the top center of the canvas is a formal doorway. Entering this picture plane means to visually go beyond it. Transcendence literally means “going beyond.” In one sense, transcendence refers to the region of “otherness,” whatever lies beyond or is other, especially other than one’s self. The title is suggestive as well. *Oasis* could be synonymous with Paradise or Heaven, yet it could also be a mirage in the desert, as the yellow light suggests. The ambiguity of its essential meaning creates a compelling element of mystery.

Helka Immonen’s search for new forms of expression has led her to create mature color field paintings, which employ shimmering colors and soft geometries. Her work is dynamic yet quiet, emanating a light from within. Collectively, they communicate sentiments that lie beyond articulation, leading us to a place that transcends the material world. □



Helka Immonen, *Island 2*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 81x90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Helka Immonen, *Oasis*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 61x65 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Helka Immonen, *Pearls*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 61x65 cm. Courtesy of the artist.