

Essay for solo show at Galerie Gris by Rachel Seligman, Malloy Curator, The Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY.

Katie DeGroot's recent watercolor paintings present tree branches thick with accretions of fungi, moss, and vine, their bark skin loose and peeling. The profusion that crowds these limbs indicates a process of decay yet is presented in a vivid riot of color, pattern, shape, and texture that belies decline, that refutes loss. This unexpected convergence produces the odd sensation of seeing something that is at once wholly familiar and entirely unknown. Although we think we know what the natural world looks like, DeGroot insists we look again, and with a more poetic, more generous, perhaps more absurdist eye. In the objects she paints, which speak of survival, adaptation, and the passage of time, we may recognize our own journeys and travails, or own gains and losses.

Intense, sometimes shocking hues and the build-up of translucent layers give these paintings a pulsing energy. DeGroot's evident pleasure in the materials and consummate control of the paint allows for passages of delicate mark making interspersed with looser, ethereal washes. What makes these works so compelling is that they occupy a space between representation and abstraction—observed reality with a heightened palette and a keen eye for the ubiquitous presence of patterns, symmetries, and repetition in nature. DeGroot's particular vision asks us to consider what is revealed when we look beyond the physical surface and into the complex systems that connect the natural world and the life of the mind.

Rachel Seligman November 2018