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Before, Between: mediating land in painted abstraction

Eleanor Conover

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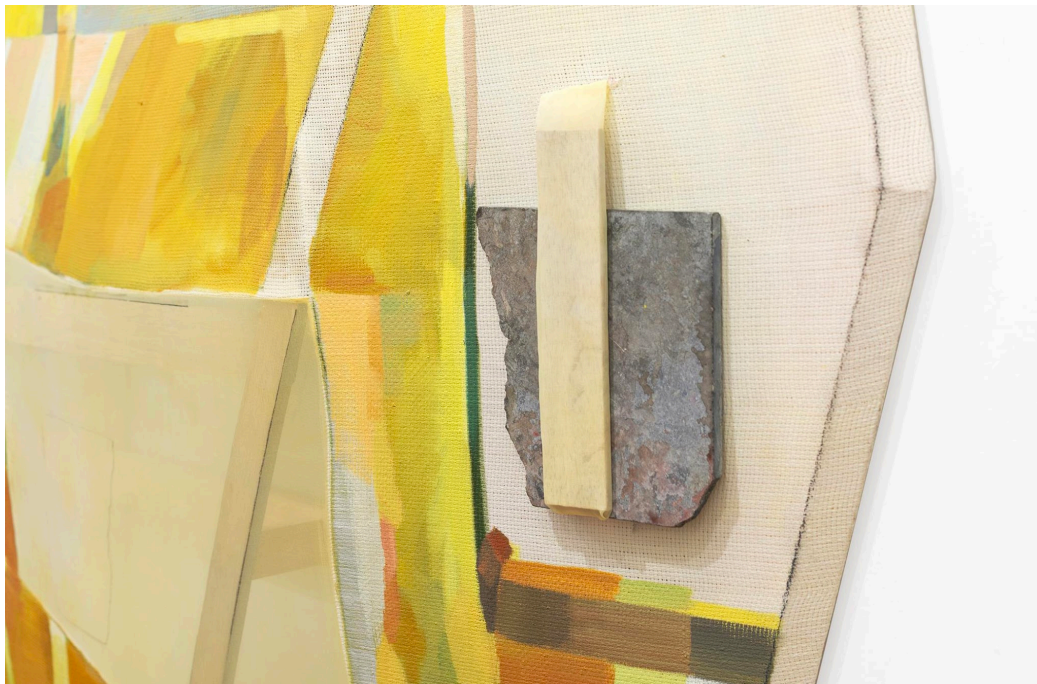
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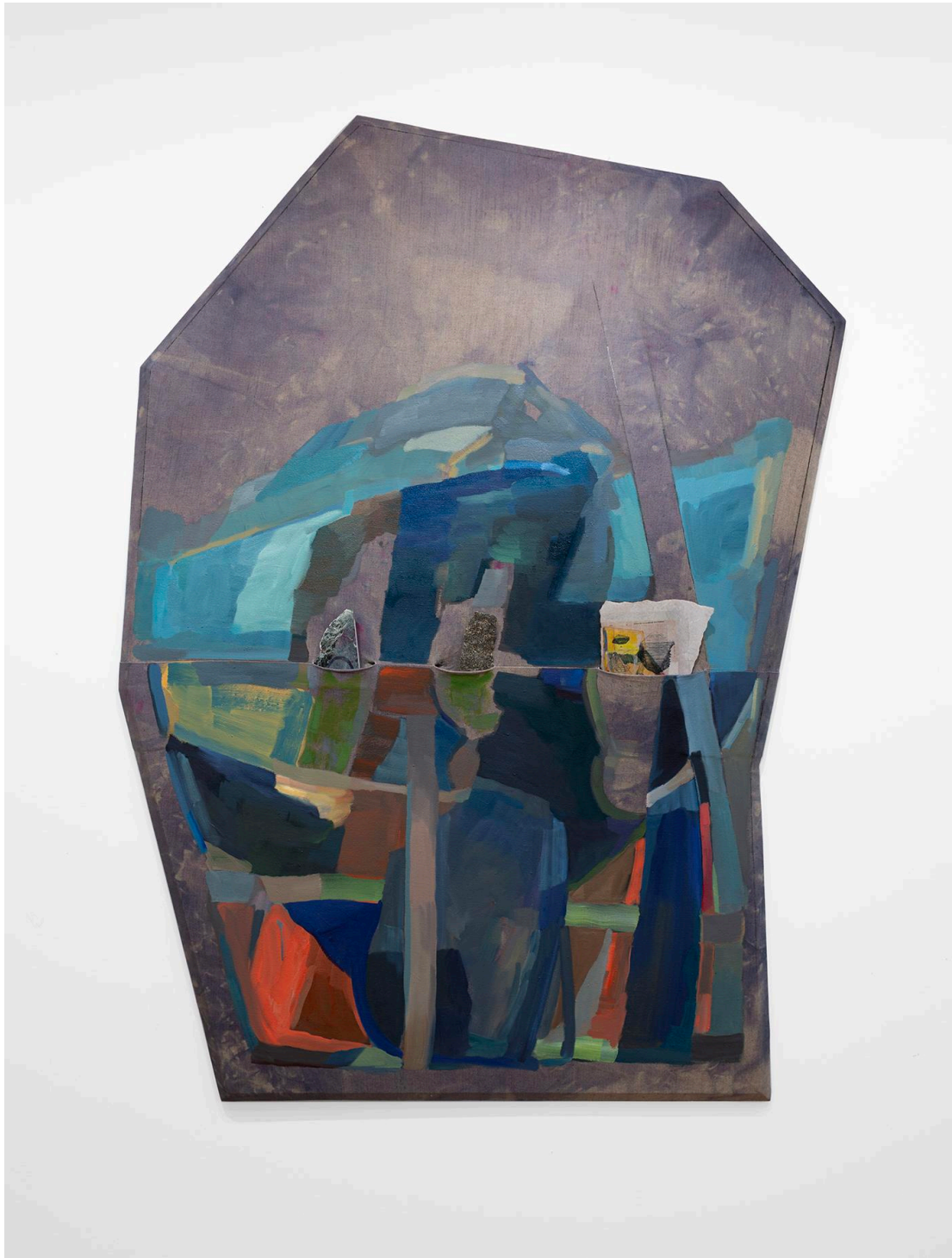
Eleanor Conover



(Detail) Eleanor Conover, *Before Between*, 2024. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen with marble, granite, bowed white oak, and beveled pine; 51 × 36 × 4 inches.



(Detail) Eleanor Conover, *From the Steep Slope*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and polyester with bowed oak, beveled pine, and marble; 63.5 × 43.5 × 4 inches.



Eleanor Conover, *Before Between*, 2024. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen with marble, granite, bowed white oak, and beveled pine; 51 × 36 × 4 inches.



Eleanor Conover, *From the Steep Slope*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and polyester with bowed oak, beveled pine, and marble; 63.5 x 43.5 x 4 inches.



Eleanor Conover, *Your Heart is Not a Stone*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and polyester with marble and beveled pine; 45.5 x 33 x 1.5 inches.



(Detail) Eleanor Conover, *Your Heart is Not a Stone*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and polyester with marble and beveled pine; 45.5 x 33 x 1.5 inches.



Eleanor Conover, *Mirror*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and canvas with bowed oak, beveled pine, marble, acrylic inkjet transfer, and granite; 49 x 34.5 x 4 inches.



(Detail) Eleanor Conover, *Mirror*, 2025. Dye, oil, and graphite on sewn linen and canvas with bowed oak, beveled pine, marble, acrylic inkjet transfer, and granite; 49 x 34.5 x 4 inches.

Artist Statement:

My paintings investigate physical surface, speculative architecture, and a questioning of representation in the built and natural environment. From 2018-2021, I lived in Tennessee, where I taught at the School of Art, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This was my first time living in the South, and to learn about the region, I traveled throughout Tennessee and western North Carolina, including to Black Mountain and to the BMC museum in Asheville. A student of mine introduced me to Anni Albers' *Work With Material* (1937), which I think about regularly in my own work and in my teaching. In particular, Albers' call to (re)connect with the inherent, tactile qualities of materials and their potential to imbue a sense of openness, flexibility, and ethical grounding feels particularly relevant for teaching and art making in a world now heavily mediated through digital interfaces. While I came to painting via the tradition of observational landscape painting, my work now incorporates notions of land and environment on a more material and metaphorical level. What I will call the surface, field, or ground, of each painting is varied, sewn together, and irregular in shape and volume. Each shape (a fragment of space) demands a new approach, unique to its condition. Albers' call to "work with material" (emphasis mine) may indeed echo the notion of working and living with the land.

These paintings begin as geometric line drawings that I build into non-rectangular structures, supporting a dyed canvas ground and subsequent layers of paint. The irregular nature of each painting's support emphasizes the perimeter, yet each form remains singular, invoking but not settling on both topographical and bodily subjects. Some paintings assert their presence by bending away from the wall like an inflated lung or wind-filled kite; others enact flatness with a thin, uniform depth. Recent paintings involve pockets or slings, which hold stones that have been collected from a working marble quarry in East Tennessee. This line of thinking emerged in part from Josef Albers' leaf studies, in which the inherent color of a natural material is simply juxtaposed against the color and form of colored paper. The eye's calibration to different material, and the resulting perceptual difference, is a way of recognizing the connection between materiality and color. In this case, it is the varied sheen and hue of quarried

marble—itself an insertion of deep, geologic time—against the tensioned, painted canvas: a mediation of human space and time. In *Mirror*, an image of a treeless, desolate landscape has been printed via acrylic transfer onto a thin piece of marble. This and other imagery on the marble suggests a printed and material archive, where the act of collecting feels subduedly optimistic: the accumulation of paint, imagery, and physical material functions both as a way to remember what has past and to save for the future.

Eleanor Conover is an artist who lives and works in Topsham, ME. Recent exhibitions include *Abattoir*, Cleveland, OH; *Praise Shadows*, Boston, MA; *White Columns*, NY, NY; and *Hudson House*, Hudson, NY. She was a recipient of the Alice C. Cole Fellowship at Wellesley College from 2020-21, and her work has been supported by residencies including the Tides Institute in Eastport, ME, and the Sam and Adele Golden Foundation in New Berlin, NY. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Bowdoin College.