



Jennifer Wynne Reeves, Bird Healer, 2012, 12 x 14 1/4"

The Worms in the Wall

**Jennifer Wynne Reeves at Bravin Lee Programs
and Mondrian's House in New York City**

by Jeanne Wilkinson

Jennifer Wynne Reeves' work is intimate and alluring. Some of it looks good enough to eat. There is an obvious love of paint and materials, along with a delicate touch, as if the work were made by fairy spirits instead of human fingers, denying its corporeality while revelling in it at the same time.

The artworks are diverse: some are "purely" abstract and non-representational; some are small land- and seascapes; some contain text, a kind of prose poetry. This is a hard mix for an artist to balance without one aspect overwhelming the others, creating rifts, and distracting the viewer. But here

there seems to be a natural harmony between the visual ideas that flows from one piece to the next and back again, each permutation revealing a different aspect of the entirety.

I am interested in the workings of the artist's mind, and this is on display here – there is evidence of a conceptual framework that is expansive yet cohesive; as if the work is different branches within the same family tree. I am always puzzled by artists such as, say, Ellsworth Kelly – while I admire the sparseness and clarity of his work, I can't imagine how he continually generates ideas out of such a tight creative space.

With Reeves's work, I can see the wandering journey, how one element leads to the next and the next, each piece becoming its own experience and its own world.

Text is written in blocky letters on the surfaces of the paintings – it seems child-like, yet well-organized, so carefully printed that it could have a gold star at the top for good penmanship. I would prefer the text to be more fragmented perhaps, less easy to read, more elliptical and integrated. While the imagery does not in any way illustrate the text, I find myself looking for connections, and this search limits my experience of the work.

Or does it? As I continue to meditate on the work, bits of the text keep filtering back to me: "Abstraction...I can feel she's there, hot with ideas, a spool of suggestions..." Art that is worth looking at asks something of us: time, thought, leaps of faith, acceptance of paradox. So maybe my search for resonance between narrative and imagery is just another way of seeing into the work, and another way for the artist to counter expectations and give us something else again.

Reeves's small landscapes on paper exist in that dreamy world between abstraction and realism and while they contain painted objects such as boats, birds, telephone poles, and actual objects such as wires, beads or hair, they are as mysterious as her purely abstract works. In one landscape, there seems to be a small nest of dark tangled hair floating in a swampy ground amidst a flurry of birds, flying, dying, calling out. The eye is drawn in by the succulent color and subtlety, and then the viewer begins to suss out the story, the sky scraped away like a flesh wound, a strange figure built of colored lines holding a limp feathered thing. There is a mood of beauty, sadness, violence, offering, which is made sense of by the title of the painting, *Bird Healer*.

Yet I keep coming back to the purely abstract, untexted pieces such as

Laughing at Snakes (2011-13), which has at its core an old frame that seems magnetized, as if it is collecting things, luring them in like a spider lures in flies and other tasty treats. Or maybe it's growing things that hang and protrude from its bony structure like skin tags: built up paint scrapings, bits of flotsam and jetsam from the life of an artist that are both meaningless and profound, pieces of a life that I would consider beautiful, but that most people would throw in the trash. Here they are saved and held by this frame that has been calling out to them: come and cover me, make me something, make me real, make me laugh, make me more than I am.

And the piece, *Untitled Cottage*

which, dated 1996 and 2013 (dates that connote a long journey), is a beautiful grid of soft, succulent blues, greens and yellows, topped by a jagged line of what looks to be white sugar-frosting. This piece feels like those pie paintings by Wayne Thiebaud that taste better than any real pie ever could. But there are two small wires protruding from the right side of *Untitled Cottage* that make the painting seem electrified, even a little dangerous, as if you touched it you'd get a jolt. There is no ordinary logic that explains these disparate elements, yet nothing appears arbitrary – instead each visual decision seems to be what the painting demanded to become itself.



Jennifer Wynne Reeves, *Untitled Cottage*, 1996-2013, 15" x 15"