



ELISABETH CONDON MIAMI

Elisabeth Condon's latest exhibition of paintings, *Walkabout*, conveys the restless energy endemic to movement, and more specifically globetrotting, which the artist has apparently been doing a lot lately [Dorsch Gallery; March 13–April 3, 2010]. In these works, Condon conjures multiple worlds with painterly panache by referencing the varied cultures and landscapes of destinations as disparate as Taiwan, Beijing, Sydney, Australia, and US locales including Los Angeles and Miami.

Although all but one of the paintings in this exhibition—*From One Place to Another*, 2010—were made while at the Fountainhead Residency in Miami, Condon is now focusing specifically on a particular tradition of Chinese painting, in which she immersed herself while in a previous residency on the outskirts of Beijing. The artist studied the unique attributes of the “four gentlemen” of Chinese painting: bamboo, orchid, chrysanthemum, and plum blossom. The plum blossom—symbolizing perseverance and resilience—figures prominently throughout this show, after ironically making an appearance in the bedroom wallpaper of her childhood home in Los Angeles. The different perspectives of Chinese scrolls seem to have given Condon a freedom of movement that Western painting has not. With this new awareness, she now combines markmaking and gesture with depictions of landscape and architecture.

Field Notes, 2010, the exhibition's centerpiece, comprises eight panels stretching along a long wall, mimicking the Yuan Dynasty scroll called *Dwelling in the Fu-Ch'un Mountains*. Read from right to left in accordance with Chinese tradition, the painting relates a narrative incorporating a variety of distinct styles that seamlessly coalesce into a compelling conveyance of experience on the road and in the mind. But these are much more than a painter's diaristic notes: Condon has mastered disparate styles and made them her own, combining them to put forth not only a sense of her own travels but of our own inner journeys as well. She uses



blobs, pours, drips, and slabs of paint in conjunction with detailed renderings of buildings, trees, and flowers, all coming together to expand our experience of what it means to dwell in various locales. In *Field Notes*, the little blue tents on the right give way to minute spider webs, which in turn cede to architectural renderings, only to then return to pure abstraction. Condon has spoken of reinventing emptiness as fullness. In this work, she manages to convey a strong sense of both: emptiness and fullness retain their distinct identities, without contradicting each other. This is perhaps a true reflection of human psychology as well as a monumental achievement in the visual translation of the vast realm of the subconscious.

Condon's paintings here fall into two loose groups: punchy in-your-face works, like *Stadium*, 2010, that hit you hard with their painterly props, and pictures that take a gentler, more circuitous approach, and sneak up on you slowly but surely, as in *From One Place to Another*. In this show, the two approaches are on opposite walls, in a stylistic face-off where the tightly compressed abstraction of *Stadium* contrasts with *From One Place to Another's* loose washes of color and subdued evocations of time and place. *Stadium's* version of a grid in pinks, grays, and a range of purples is open enough to allow the ubiquitous plum blossom branch to enter stage right and stretch horizontally across the canvas. Glimmering blobs of magenta and orange-crimson dot the lower half of the canvas while a spray of orange splatters and white drips rains down on a starkly rendered stadium, not immediately noticeable amid the rest of the action. Dramatic shifts in scale show up in each work, as do virtuoso displays of paint handling. Neither conjures a specific place, but both evoke a dream-like liquid state of immersion in a world of notes and impressions. This immersion is the essence of Condon's ethos, simultaneously activated by paint itself and by her profound experiences.

—Amanda Church

and Art Palace, Houston]; Elisabeth Condon, *Night Sky*, 2010, acrylic on