



# IMMERSED

"AMBROSIA" THE PAINTINGS OF ASHLEY GARRETT

At September Gallery, Kinderhook NY

by Jeanette Fintz

There are certain moments on certain days in certain places that are memorable, if one is lucky enough to be aware enough to be witness to them—that are so sublime as to take you momentarily out of your ordinary state and drown you in sensation. Happily lost, perhaps this shower of delight or awe lasts only long enough for you to catch up to your workaday self to prevent you from stepping off the curb into on-coming traffic.

Ashley Garrett's paintings in the show entitled *Ambrosia* at September Gallery are aiming to impart to the viewer that experience. Experience is the key word, for Ashley's works are not plein-air pieces painted from the eye "but what an EYE", of Monet and the Impressionists, but from mind/body memory of a situation. The canvas support is there to catch the bits of sensations that have lodged in the nerves and muscles and brain of Ashley.

This sounds like they could almost be choreographed into a dance, but unlike the Action Painting school of Abstract Expressionism the rhythmic self-referential and directive strokes

that build up surface in those works, thereby moving your attention from place to place to balance the visual field, do not top the agenda. That's not to say the paintings don't do those things or possess many powerfully placed brushstrokes. But the real agenda is to bring forth and transmit the memory of total immersion in nature, that *Umwelt* of one of Ashley's marvelous titles, that includes but is not limited to the visual sense.

Abstract Impressionism coming in on the coattails of Abstract Expressionism and heavy on the optical vibrations and broken mark-making of impressionism, combined the two genres and fits a bit more comfortably as an antecedent to Garrett's painting approach. But her intention isn't to dazzle the eye, though many pieces do, or construct something nearly solid from particulate matter, but to bring together through recall of incident and feeling, a convincing and transporting experience shared between herself and the viewer.

The very smallest of Garrett's paintings often done on paper, reduce a moment to its essence and like a haiku they exist to savor for the future the

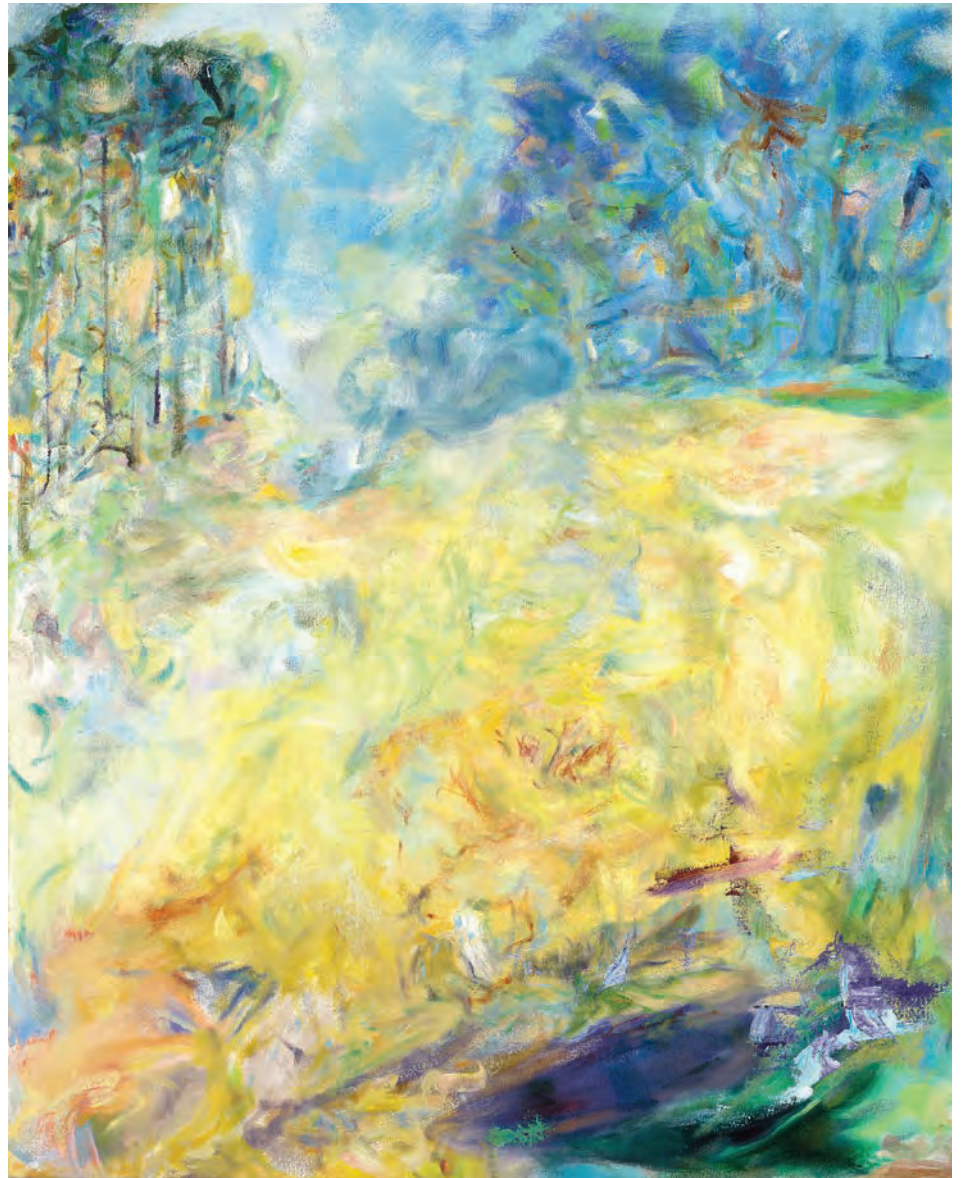
memory associated with that sensation, triggered by that shape of shadow or dance of grasses at twilight. And that's all you get. It's not a sonnet it's a haiku. You, the participant sharing the moment must bring to the piece your own memory of a such tremor of light and animate it with your associations thus prolonging, and still catalyzed by it.

In the opposing size category, I was intrigued by the tall vertical paintings in the show, like *Flume* and *Verge* for how they indicated the location of a sensate presence at about human scale, without precisely forming one. The realization of this locus has to do with how Garrett develops, through brushy distribution of colored marks or the placement of streaks of shadow, the sense of peripheral vision of a witness. Color theorists claim that color appears more saturated when seen from the corner of the eye rather than frontally. Ashley gathers her inspiration for the paintings by walking in nature. Notably in the paintings, little flickers and vibrations spread out and surround the hypothetical walker in nature with context,





Ashley Garrett *Henbane* 2021  
Oil on canvas 12" x 12"



Ashley Garrett *Verge* 2023 Oil on canvas 40" x 32"

pressing forward as a curved space, shifting as she moves, no solid ground but an accretion of glimmers marking her progress. I was struck by how little ground solidity or concern for the ground there actually was in these and others of the smaller paintings on canvas. A consciousness merged with the effulgent glow is what I take away from these.

Garrett uses a varied, responsive vocabulary of strokes and marks that often are determined by a feeling of what needs to happen in that zone of her canvas rather than as descriptive of a particular plant or tree or grass. One of my favorite pieces, *Henbane*, has a very active lower portion—can't really call it a foreground (but almost, notable for that itself), constructed from accretions of a full range of softly neutral colors in joyful, curling densely packed gestures. That lower portion is so physically present that it rises up and forward to fill half the painting while the top portion of this square format is stabilized by a deep purple shadow shape nearly smack center. It's a very satisfying and mysterious resolution both for

its opacity in the context of so much softly blurring complementary colors, and, also, for its definition. It immediately recalled a thematic shape in Virginia Woolf's "To The Lighthouse" in which the landscape painter Lily Briscoe is preoccupied by a shadow shape in her composition, which ultimately recalls and symbolically resolves, through her deeply internalized connection to it, the events of a past summer idyl and the intervening events spanning a decade later.

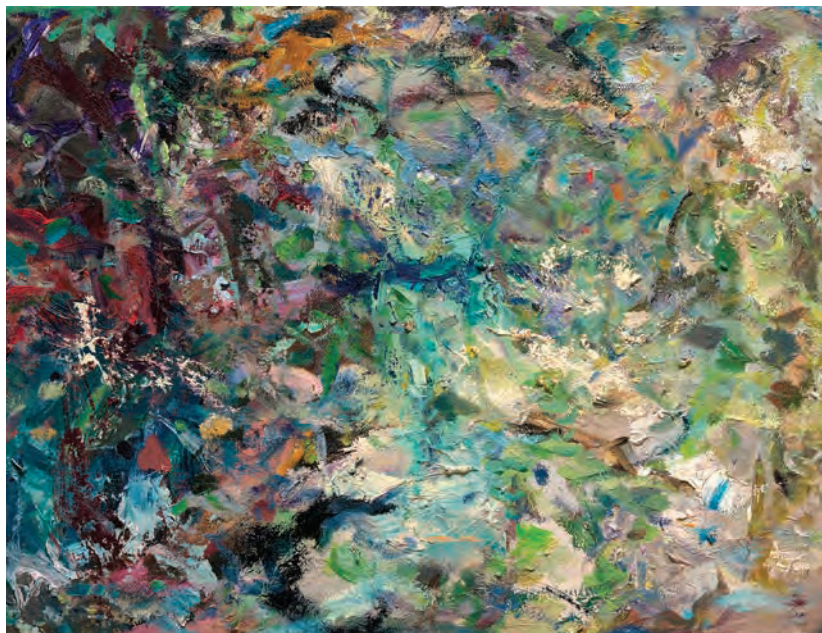
This brings up the subject of time which is implicit in all landscape paintings and is very much part of Garrett's concerns. The sense of summer and warmth captured through a palette of soft complementary colors of yellows and blues can be found in many pieces in this show. The paintings that intrigue me are the ones that are creating a half-light reminiscent of twilight, a liminal zone where shadow can shift from warm to cool and as dusk sets in, the environment becomes an opalescent shimmer. Painted grounds of muddy neutral blue start glowing against deeper more saturated blues, greens, and oranges in paintings like

*Chiral* and *Umbra*. Since these weren't painted from life the time it takes to build up the color and for it to create a world *is* the time in the piece, I would suggest, depicting a suspended *inner* world which is non-specific and timeless. *Henbane*, *Chiral* and *Scintilla* all contain that value key called extended middle minor that transmits an eerie transitional mood. *Vespertine*, one of the several still life paintings have that wide range of dark middle values and more, balancing the rich darks against splotchy emphatic off-white strokes, pulling one of the most dramatic contrasts in the show. Another high contrast piece is the bracing, gestural *Freshet*, a large vertical painting in a major key.

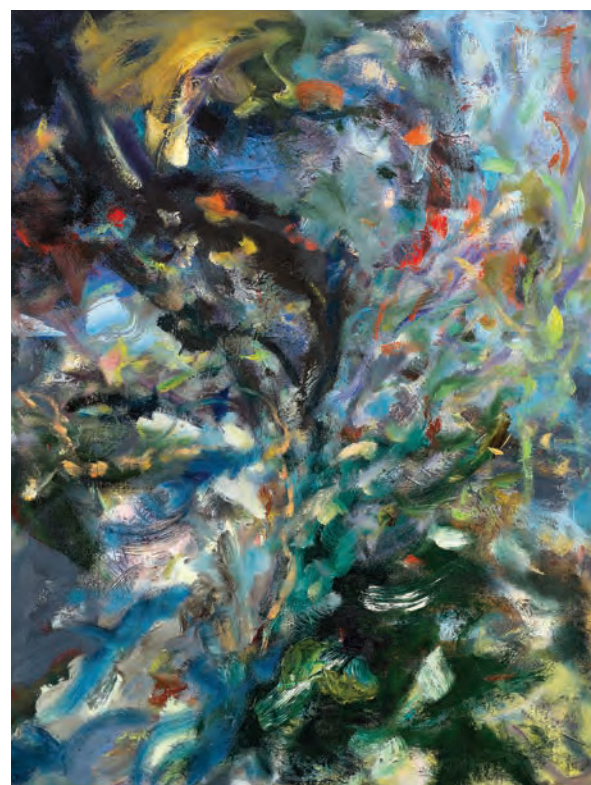
Garrett often composes using a softly arcing diagonal movement in smaller works like *Umwelt* and longer verticals as *Freshet* and *Verge* that keep the picture plane mostly frontal, and very slightly receding into space. Two of my favorite small ones, *Umbra* and *Chiral* do the exact opposite, throwing the viewer right into a thicket of *Continued on next page...*



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Ashley Garrett *Umbra* 2021 Oil on canvas 16" x 20"



Ashley Garrett, *Vespertine* 2023  
Oil on canvas, 24" x 18"



Ashley Garrett, *Umwelt* 2022  
Oil on canvas, 10" x 8"





Ashley Garrett *Chiral* 2021 Oil on canvas 9" x 12"

middle ground energetic markings and tangles of strokes. The larger scale off-white marks sitting on top of and moving across the surface in *Umbra* push back against all that bristling providing a foil and some temperamental distance by setting up a new spatial level in relation to the color beneath.

There has been some discussion comparing Garrett's paintings and those of Joan Mitchell the great second - generation Abstract Expressionist. I see some similarities of color palette and indirectly something comparable with respect to their in-studio rather than plein-air production process, but for me that's where it ends. Focusing on the quality and variety of brushwork; In her large major paintings, Mitchell used a vocabulary of similar size and type of strokes, grouped together to build semipermeable zones or walls of colored marks. To my mind, they are premeditated, and quite assertively directive even while the color is wooing the viewer with shimmers of nature. Garrett's color and stroke come from a more internalized source. They project an intimate spontaneity, sometimes even appearing awkward and tentative. And they feel honest. The diversity of approach to stroke and surface can be viewed as both a strength and a weakness, depending upon one's inclination. There is courage and confidence in

that tentativeness. In all their glory Mitchell's paintings feel like they were produced for the viewer. Garrett's feel like they were done for herself.

Ashley Garrett (b. 1984) graduated with a BFA from the School of Visual Arts. Solo and two-person exhibitions include Love Apple Art Space (Ghent, NY), Gold Montclair (Montclair, NJ), Hood Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), Chase Gallery (West Hartford, CT), SRO (Brooklyn, NY), RISD Memorial Hall Gallery (Providence, RI), and SEPTEMBER (Hudson, NY). Garrett has participated in group exhibitions at Ladies' Room (Los Angeles, CA), Katonah Museum (Katonah, NY), Regina Rex (New York, NY), The Painting Center (New York, NY), Planthouse (New York, NY), Orgy Park (Brooklyn, NY), Torrance Art Museum (Los Angeles, CA), Geoffrey Young Gallery (Great Barrington, MA), Cross Contemporary Art (Saugerties, NY), Every Woman Biennial (New York, NY), Brian Morris Gallery (New York, NY), Schema Projects (Brooklyn, NY), Berkshire Museum (Pittsfield, MA), Woodstock Artists Association and Museum (Woodstock, NY), Berkshire Botanical Garden Leonhardt Gallery (Stockbridge, MA), Hudson Hall (Hudson, NY). Garrett's work has been reviewed by The

Brooklyn Rail, Two Coats of Paint, and Caesura Magazine, among others, and the artist has been interviewed by Gorky's Granddaughter, Art Spiel. Ashley Garrett lives and works in East Chatham, NY.

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Ambrosia Show dates: July 10 - July 30, 2023.  
 SEPTEMBER 4 HUDSON STREET #3,  
 KINDERHOOK NY 12106  
 SEPTEMBERGALLERY.COM  
 Hours: Thursday & Friday 11-5pm,  
 Saturday 10- 5pm Sunday 11-4pm  
 And by appointment.  
 Contact: kristen@septembergallery.com  
 dominique@septembergallery.com

*Jeanette Fintz is painter of geometric abstraction, an arts writer and sometime curator who resides in Hudson NY. She is represented by The Lockwood Gallery, Kingston NY, Carrie Haddad Gallery, Hudson NY, & Carrie Chen Gallery, Great Barrington MA. Her recent unstretched collaged paintings were featured in BUILT at The Lockwood Gallery through July 30 2023.*