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## Metaphorical Movement: Neysa Grassi and Warren Rohrer at Locks Gallery

By Christa DiMarco, April 7, 2014

The paintings of Neysa Grassi (1951- ) and Warren Rohrer (1927-1995), both at Locks Gallery through April 30th, provide a much-needed respite for my senses. We can all stand before their subtly engaging imagery for a good while — it provides an antidote to the humdrum monotony of an all-too-long winter. In both bodies of work, lush surfaces convey nature transformed and connote delicate exchanges embodied with fluidity and movement.



Neysa Grassi, "Endless Source I," 2014, oil on wood panel, 11 x 11 inches

Grassi is a Philadelphia-based artist who has been exhibiting with Locks Gallery since 1996. In most of the imagery in *Endless Source* there is an infinite depth. However, in the large-scale "Lake Darling" (2013-14), we can revel in the panel's wood-grain texture, which has been revealed — sanded down, perhaps — to imply a rippling surface. And in the intimately sized "Deep Pool Lake I" (2012-13), "Endless Source I" (2012-14), and "Angel Lake" (2012-14), heavy impasto-paint forms gather and swirl, materializing the intangible presence of a breeze in tactile medium. In "Broken Bow Lake" (2012-14) and "Storm Lake" (2012-14), there is a sense of a wide expanse, and yet a gently lapping shallow surface. Are we above gazing down at, or within and surrounded by, a body of water?

From these paradoxical ambiguities, watery forms emerge, but they have shed some of their sealike qualities and are instead cloaked in an earthy materiality. Nonetheless, a strong sense of movement, like that of a quietly rolling wind that has stirred a liquid

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surface, remains. These exchanges suggest that languid, malleable appearances are transmutable. Watery forms and transitory effects become substantive, belying their qualities and complicating our expectations of water as an easily understandable and familiar natural thing.



Warren Rohrer, "Mauve Shift," 1977, oil on linen, 72 x 72 inches

*Message Bearer* is Rohrer's 20th exhibition with Locks Gallery, where his work has been represented since 1974. From this exhibition, it seems he was committed to a unified surface of marks, to, he wrote, "make a live painting." Large-scale paintings "Mauve Shift" (1977) and "November" (1973) are fields in a figurative sense. Having grown up in Lancaster, Rohrer's paintings often take inspiration from farmlands, but allusively.

"Mauve Shift" is essentially a landscape, wholly translated with the forceful mark of Rohrer's brush and layers of hue. A wall of color implies a swaying field of crops, a blanket of long stems that bow gently under the sun's rays that are referenced in the soft-orange specks that peak out from behind the light purple. Color and mark are not static — "Mauve Shift" is in motion. Here, Rohrer's repetitive mark and monochromatic color suggests atmospheric effects and the symbolic relationship among labor, sustenance, and organic growth.

Together, the exhibitions seem to consider abstraction in contemporary painting. What message do Rohrer's canvases bring, and in what indirect way does Grassi's current work respond? Similar to Neo-Impressionist painters Georges Seurat and Vincent van Gogh, Grassi and Rohrer use nature as a substructure for layered mark-making, texture, and hue. *Message Bearer* metaphorically conveys the symbol of movement, and *Endless Source* complicates the associative symbolism of natural forms.