



"July 27, 2020" is one of the small works in Rocío Rodríguez's Sandler Hudson exhibition. The diaristic pieces are pastels, and oil on pastel, on paper at 11 x 14 inches.

## **Review: Rocío Rodríguez looks to the West and inside in new show at Sandler Hudson**

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[DEANNA SIRLIN \(HTTPS://WWW.ARTSATL.ORG/AUTHOR/DEANNASIRLIN/\)](https://www.artsatl.org/author/deannasirlin/) × FEBRUARY 22, 2021

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**\*\* EXTENDED THROUGH MARCH 27.**

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For centuries, artists have sought out the natural world. Since the 19th century, American artists have traveled to the Western part of the country to experience the expansiveness and the untouched quality of the landscape and ignite in their work a sense of light, nature and place.

When Rocío Rodríguez (<https://rociorodriguez.net/home.html>) was fortunate to be an artist in residence in Marfa, Texas, she found herself turning to nature as had many of her great predecessors.

Rodríguez's exhibition, *At the Edge of the Day* — at Sandler Hudson Gallery (<http://www.sandlerhudson.com/>) through March 20 — includes paintings and drawings that reflect her experience of time and place during her journey westward. In this body of work, Rodríguez, an abstract artist, paints the landscape in a representational mode, depicting its big skies and low horizons using only a tonal gray scale.

A series of large paintings on canvas of the high desert instigates a dialogue between earth and sky through composition. Rodríguez uses thin washes in a range of gray tones. The oil paintings have the appearance of large charcoal drawings; the touch and presence of Rodríguez's marks reflect the mastery that comes from drawing for five-plus decades. The rich palette of these paintings represents the light and clouds

as they sweep across large horizons just before dusk. Dominated by Western skies, these compositions make one feel the largeness of nature and the smallness of self. Their tonality evokes a feeling of remembrance, a sense of nostalgia for this place, a snapshot of an emotional response to the landscape and sky.



Rocío Rodríguez

Although the paintings are representational, Rodríguez deploys compositional elements in non-naturalistic ways, as when she layers one strip of sky above two others in the aptly titled *Three Sunsets* (2019). This reiteration of images of the sky makes its relationship to the thin piece of ground below even more pronounced. The work is all about the movement and expanse of the clouds above held in place by the earth below. In *Passing Skies* (2020), Rodríguez stacks two images of ground, trees and sky on top of one another, with the lower one the reverse of the upper one. Such repetitions lend these paintings a feeling of cinematic dream sequences filtered through the poetry of the location.

Although the heart of this exhibition is the group of large paintings shown in the gallery's front room, it's essential to venture into the back of the space to see Rodríguez's small works from 2019 (all acrylic on panel proportioned 16 x 20 inches) and 2020 (all pastel and oil pastel on paper at 11 x 14 inches).



Rocío Rodríguez, "Three Sunsets" (2019), oil on canvas, 56 x 48 inches.

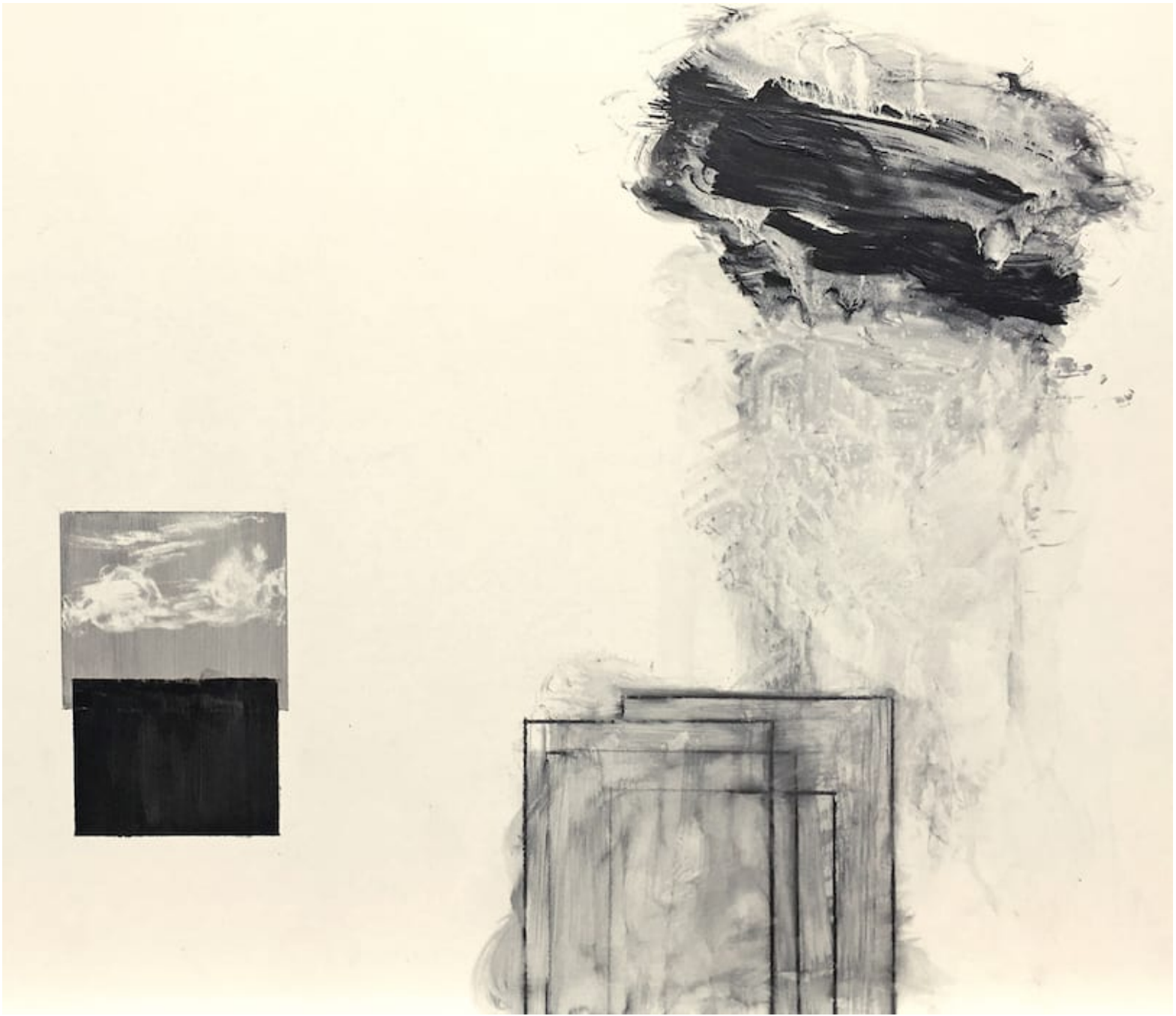
These diaristic drawings are titled with the date they were finished. They're visual records that offer glimpses into the artist's ideas as she engages the landscape in a dialogue of abstraction and representation. The panels from 2019 are all composed on a warm, creamy white ground; translucent squares drawn with paint are built of layers of soft color that sit upon one other in balanced totems that precariously hold their equilibrium.

Rodríguez searches for forms that are centered; the squares are weighted and balanced.

*September 11, 2019*, named for the anniversary of the World Trade Center terror attacks of 2001, is composed of two rectangles, one on top of the other. The larger one at the top is in a dark indigo that suggests the nighttime sky with flecks that could be stars or debris. Below it is a soft gray painterly form like a cloud, and then a space. At the bottom edge, drawn blue lines delineate a rectangular shape that might reference buildings. The image is balanced and understated, yet it inevitably refers to what we remember of that day and the emotions it stirs.

The elements of *September 26, 2019*, are similar, but the compositional balance is different. A small squarish ultramarine-blue shape sits at the bottom of the page on the left. Beside this solid form, a balancing act of soft painterly forms sit on top of each other, each layer more precarious than the next, yet the stacked forms stand together. The artist's touch is evident in each of the stacked layers whose colors modulate from gold to gray to a very soft blue that dissolves and hangs over the side of the square below it.





Rocío Rodríguez, "Sept. 8, 2019," acrylic on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches.

These diary entries in drawing form reflect the differences between 2019 and 2020. In 2020, the square shapes become calendar boxes that are crossed out, eradicated and glow from the heat of a palette of warm oranges, yellows and pinks. These are quintessential pandemic drawings as we all reach inward seeking light, hope and renewal.

In *July 16, 2020*, the skeleton of a soft rectangular frame appears several times, the surface and color underneath rubbed out. Layers of rose and gold beside this rectangle vibrate with color. An orange square rises to the surface of this heat-filled pool of light. So much of the experience of the pandemic is expressed here: We want to cancel every day of the pandemic and go back; we want to understand what we are feeling; and we want to find the light at the end of the tunnel.

In this exhibition, Rodríguez asks big questions about our place in the universe and takes a risk by showing all these works at the same time. But without this kind of risk, there is no art. Rodríguez understands this well. After decades of honing her voice, she invites viewers to join her in her pursuit of light and balance in pandemic times as she seeks, in her own words, “a confrontation with something bigger than myself.”



(<https://www.atlantaopera.org/performances/#threepennycarmen>)

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