

Luminous Depth: The Evocative Abstraction of Susan English

By **Caroline Margaret**



Borrowed From the Sky tinted polymer on Dibond panel 59" x 48" 2024

Susan English's *Borrowed From the Sky* (2024), a painting in tinted polymer on a Dibond panel, exemplifies the artist's mastery of material, surface, and perception. Through this work, she continues her thoughtful investigation into the behavior of color and the ways in which light interacts with layered textures.

The surface shimmers with a quiet radiance, evoking an emotional landscape that invites viewers to slow down, absorb, and reflect.

At once serene and dynamic, the painting appears to shift with ambient light—what seems like a solid field of color at one moment reveals subtle tonal gradations the next. These evolving qualities make the work feel alive as if it were in conversation with its environment. In this way, *Borrowed From the Sky* embodies English's dedication to creating contemplative visual experiences through abstraction.

A Material Language of Light and Time

At the core of Susan English's practice lies a deep engagement with process and materiality. Over the years, she has developed a unique method of pouring polymer paint onto panels, allowing gravity, time, and her own sense of control to shape the outcome. Each layer is poured with precision, and then left to settle naturally—forming striations, pools, and translucent veils of color.

This system of accumulation results in surfaces that are luminous and complex. What may appear minimal at first glance often reveals rich tonal interplay and unexpected shifts upon closer viewing. English's commitment to letting the material lead while maintaining careful orchestration is what gives her paintings their distinct resonance. The surfaces read almost like glass—sleek yet organic, solid yet responsive.

Rather than depict specific landscapes or narratives, English captures the *feel* of natural phenomena: the hush of an overcast sky, the weight of humidity, or the

soft luminosity of dawn. Her work resists categorization, instead existing in the liminal space between perception and memory.

Solo Exhibitions and Evolving Practice

English's commitment to her craft has earned her recognition across the United States. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at respected galleries such as Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in New York City, Kenise Barnes Fine Art in Kent, Connecticut, Bryant Street Gallery in Palo Alto, California, and Ellio Fine Art in Houston, Texas.

These exhibitions trace the evolution of an artist who is constantly refining her relationship to color, texture, and surface tension. Rather than making radical shifts from one body of work to the next, English works in thoughtful iterations, each series building upon the discoveries of the last. This approach allows for a deepening rather than a departure—an unfolding of visual language rooted in discipline and reflection.

A Life of Recognition and Quiet Innovation

Susan English's contributions to the field of contemporary abstraction have not gone unnoticed. She has received fellowships from the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming and the Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts in Ithaca, New York—two institutions known for supporting artists with rigorous and experimental practices. In 2020, she was awarded the prestigious Mercedes Matter Award by

the New York Studio School, an honor recognizing her contributions to formal exploration and painterly invention.

Her paintings have also been featured in a wide range of publications, including *The New York Times*, *Widewalls Magazine*, *Whitehot Magazine*, *Chronogram*, *Abstract Art Online*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Highlands Current*. This breadth of coverage speaks to the widespread relevance of her work—its ability to resonate across audiences, from collectors to critics to fellow artists.

The *New York Times* has described her paintings as “sublime” and “buoyant”—apt terms for artworks that defy gravity with their weightless appearances and emotional depth.

Rooted in the Hudson Valley

English lives and works in the Hudson Valley, a region long known for inspiring artists through its ever-changing skies, rich natural light, and atmospheric variation. This environment subtly informs her work—not through direct depiction, but through a shared sensibility. Like the shifting moods of the sky or the way mist rolls over the landscape, her paintings are full of suggestion rather than specificity.

Her surroundings offer not only visual inspiration but also the slower rhythm necessary for her process. The quietude and focus of the Hudson Valley support the methodical pouring, drying, and layering that define her approach.

An Invitation to Look Again

What distinguishes English's work is the way it invites prolonged engagement. These are paintings that don't reveal themselves all at once. Instead, they unfold—first as color, then as light, then as atmosphere. They ask the viewer to return again and again, each time discovering new qualities, new harmonies.

In an age of rapid image consumption, English offers an alternative: art that prioritizes stillness over spectacle, depth over immediacy. Her work doesn't clamor for attention—it rewards attention.

Conclusion: The Poetics of Surface

Susan English's abstract paintings are quiet revolutions. Through a disciplined commitment to process and a poetic sensitivity to materials, she has developed a body of work that is both formally sophisticated and emotionally resonant. *Borrowed From the Sky*, like many of her paintings, is not about depicting the world—it's about evoking the experience of being in it.

Her art speaks to the subtle, the gradual, the revealed. It challenges us to slow down, to witness, and to feel—to see how much meaning can reside in a single surface, and how profoundly color and light can move us when they are handled with care and clarity.

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