

Sara MacCulloch: New Paintings

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By [John Goodrich](#)

In her first exhibition at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, Sara MacCulloch catches the fields, shores and forests of her native Nova Scotia in broad, fluid brushstrokes and nuanced hues. Not often do landscape paintings seem at once so voluptuous and so spare.

At a glance, the paintings appear to aim for a quick and easy seduction. (The artist indeed produces them in single painting sessions, in order to preserve their freshness of technique.) Gaze awhile, though, and her adroit color and evocative atmosphere offer lingering rewards.



öWinter Riverö by Sara MacCullough

She energizes her simplified forms with subtle shifts of hue; milky off-whites are especially effective in a painting like öWinter Riverö (2009), in which gray-greens and various warm grays

lend a palpable thickness to the air between foreground trunks and distant trees. One senses the kind of clouded winter day when snow falls so finely that it's felt rather than seen. In "Beach Waves" (2009), faint, sweeping arcs of surf neatly plant a beach beneath a large sky which, barely differing in its greenish-blue hue from the water, nevertheless conveys a wholly different impression of vacant depths. These two worlds are crisply divided by a knifing horizontal of cerulean blue: a wave, breaking perhaps a hundred feet from the viewer.

If MacCulloch's elegant strokes and evanescent tints sometimes flirt with the decorative, her paintings are generally saved by a cool adherence to observed fact—to, say, the busy gathering of trees rooted at the far side of streaming green bands in "Fields Near Kingsport" (2009). A trip to Great Britain produced the spirited "Fields, England" (2009), in which bushes, posed tensely at either side, frame a broad recession into space. At the canvas's center, just before the ground sweeps down to a distant patchwork of farmland, a tree stares back at us, small but determined. Most memorable of all is the small panel "Dusk, England" (2009), with deeper darks poignantly locating a lone tree among shifting plains of green. MacCulloch is consistently adept at orchestrating the suggestive, but here she also deliberates on the rhythmic meaning of particulars. Such moments hint of what might occur in a sketch by Corot, in which the final miracle is that formal impulses—cohering, compounding, quantifying—yield so naturally the appearance of a tree.

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Sara MacCulloch: New Paintings, through Nov. 14. Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, 529 W. 20th St. (betw. 10th & 11th Aves.), 212-366-5368.