

Matt Blackwell



Recommended by Karen Wilkin

Matt Blackwell's paintings can seem autobiographical or diaristic. We come to know an idiosyncratic world inhabited by agile personages and animals, both threatening and benign, sometimes fused into a single being, engaged in enigmatic activities. They swim, cart each other in wheelbarrows, stare at us. We start thinking of them as Blackwell's familiars, inspired by real life encounters but transformed by his brush into something otherworldly. Close looking often reveals half-hidden messages that can offer clues to Blackwell's taste in music or politics. Or not. Sometimes a picture is just a picture. However we choose to read his elusive images and visual clues, we are ultimately captured by his gorgeous paint handling and his orchestration of surprising hues; Blackwell's touch is always expressive. His sense of unexpected color is essential to both the structure of his paintings and to carrying the burden of his skewed, engaging narratives.

Karen Wilkin, Fall 2020

Bio

Matt Blackwell received his BFA from the Portland School of Art, Maine, participated in the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and received his MFA from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC. Blackwell received a Purchase Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2006) and his work was included in the 2013 Maine Biennial and is currently in "Modern Menagerie." Fellowship residencies include: Yaddo; Sculpture Space in Utica, NY; Vermont Studio Center; Triangle Arts Association; and Art Lot in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Blackwell is represented by the Edward Thorp Gallery, New York where he has had six solo shows and by Greenhut Gallery in Portland, Maine. In addition to a solo exhibition at Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn, Blackwell's work has been exhibited at Studio 10 and Parker's Box in Brooklyn, NY, John Davis Gallery (Hudson, NY), Hartwick College (Oneonta, NY), and Savannah College of Art and Design (Atlanta, GA). He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2015.

Artist Statement

My work is primarily figurative, mostly painterly narratives found through the process of painting and drawing. I have worked from observation and nature for many years and many of my paintings join life drawing with imagery drawn from imagination to create paintings that explore a range of concerns and themes. Some of the paintings filter my long term interest in rural life using imagery drawn from direct observation (specifically Northeastern New York State, New England, and Maine) with contemplation of perspectives and experiences often marginalized by urban and mainstream culture. The places conjured in these paintings are both haunted by the past and threatened by the changing world of the present. I share this perspective with contemporary writers like Russell Banks and Carolyn Chute, whose books also chronicle the neglected voices of the rural poor. With their obsolescent, beat-up bodies and the make-do practicality of their maintenance, the cars in some of my paintings articulate a darkly humorous narrative about endurance and how we all survive the breakdowns and potholes of everyday life via persistence, ingenuity and a sustaining sense of the absurd. At the same time, I layer these representations of rural and city life with an irony, exaggeration and fantasy conjured from imagination that lends my work a certain irreverent defiance and critical content. Image, presentation, and my own manipulation of the paint are intent on undermining the way we see. More than reproducing the commonplace (that is, what we think we already know), my paintings infuse form and integrity into a perspective and aesthetic often displaced or undervalued by class difference and wealth in the shifting locus of the American dream. Maine has been a well spring for my work for many years. I return as frequently as I can to draw inspiration from its light and landscape as well as for the narrative it provides in its independence of mind and its citizens' "can do" attitude.



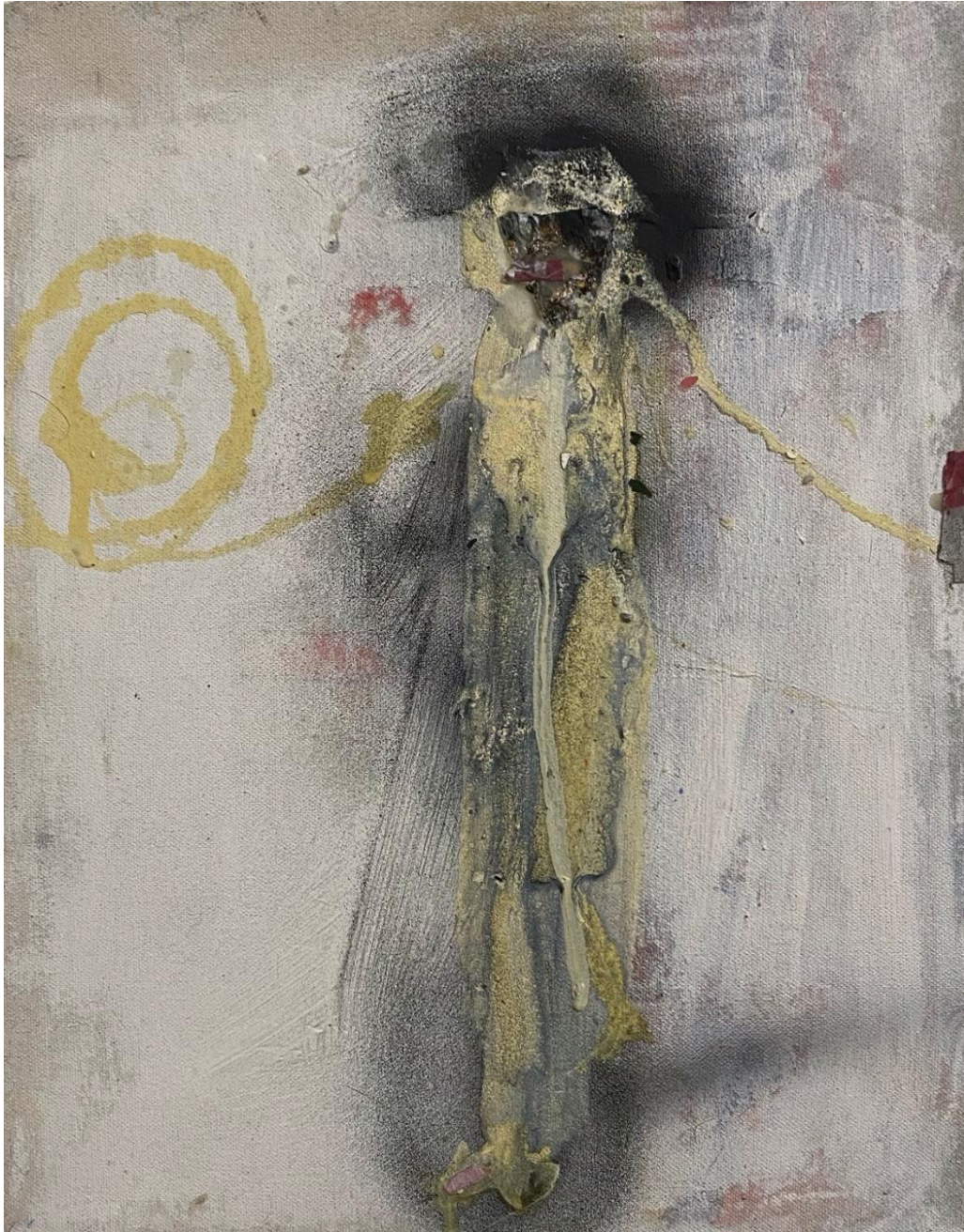
Matt Blackwell 2012, Venus's Pool. 16"x22" Oil on Canvas



Matt Blackwell 2012, Bather and Firefly. 28"x22" Oil on Canvas.



Matt Blackwell 2020, Triptych. 20"x 48" Oil on Canvas



Matt Blackwell 2010, Winter. 14"x11" Oil on Canvas and Collage