

Suzanne Caporael

Anne Chu

Christina Hejtmanek

Chris Patch

# On a Clear Day

Gahlberg Gallery at the McAninch Arts Center



Courtesy moniquemelochegallery, Chicago

*Peak* by Chris Patch, 2001, 38" x 45", vinyl paint on MDF

**On a Clear Day** you can see forever, or so the saying goes. These days it's more like 50 miles if you're lucky. Even in remote parts of the country, like the arid four corners region of the southwest, there is enough dust and smog in the air from vacationers on their way to Telluride or the Grand Canyon that visibility has been severely compromised. A bronze plaque installed by the Bureau of Land Management in southern Utah in the mid-1900s points out various geological features along a distant ridgeline.

On most days, the ridge is entirely lost in haze, rendering the plaque obsolete. Clear days are a rarity.

Chris Patch captures that clear, yet gauzy, air in his landscape paintings. You can see it in *Peak*; the way the mountain has a more diffuse coloring than the trees in the foreground. However, pollution is not the concern of these paintings; rather air particulates are simply a fact. Lighter coloring of background subject matter is a conventional

technique for indicating distance and aiding perspective. Patch, however, starts with a milky palette even when rendering foreground objects. The effect is something akin to sophisticated animation cells. Think of the background in Road Runner cartoons without the fantastical exaggerations. In addition, detail in Patch's imagery is reduced to solid chunks of color as found in a paint-by-numbers painting where no shading or blending occurs. The hard-edged color divisions combined with a suppression of brush marks make the paintings seem almost mechanically produced as in a screen print or lithograph. This stripped down, bare bones method, combined with a good-humored choice of color, makes for a unique style that is approachable without being sugary.

Anne Chu on the other hand, pumps up the intensity of natural color a couple notches in her three-

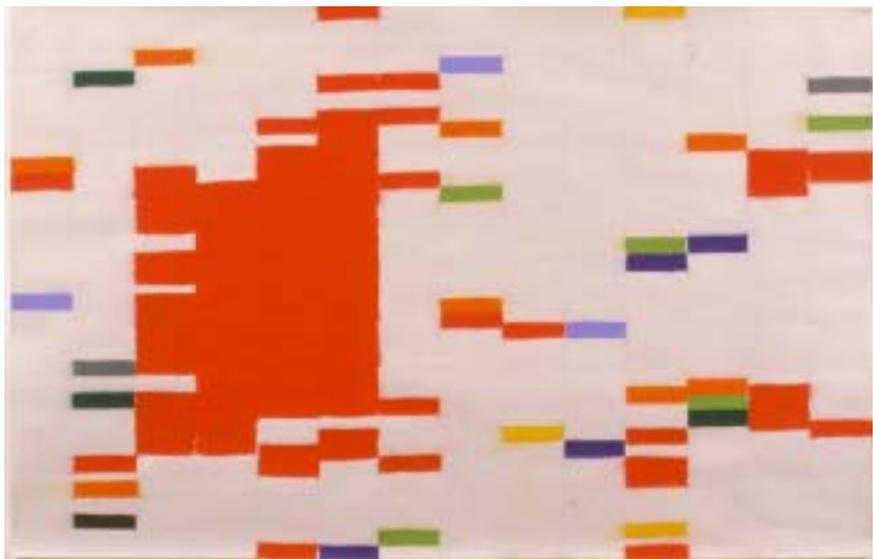
dimensional expressionistic landscapes. The color, while exaggerated, has its source in reality, which helps ground us to a general region and gives the viewer a sense of place. We know these colors from experience, yet the increase in saturation makes the wooden hills come alive.

The vitality of these landforms is also achieved by Chu's tool of choice: a chain saw. We can envision her as some omnipotent god or modern day Paul Bunyan giving shape to raw terrain. The rough cutting mimics the action of water and rain, making light work of a process that normally takes millennia. Erosion, which typically carves buttes, escarpments, canyons and gorges, is ironically replaced here by the very instrument used to denude mountain sides of their trees and in turn hasten soil loss and cause stream bed silt buildup. Rarely is subject matter and sculptural process linked with such clarity.



Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

*Seven Views of Landscape, No. 3* by Anne Chu, 1999, 20" x 71" x 48", oil and casein on wood



Courtesy Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago

*Chile/The Andes* by Suzanne Caporael, 2000, 26" x 40", gouache on paper

In the landscape gouaches and prints of Suzanne Caporael, color is once again a central issue. So central in fact, that few people would recognize these works on paper as dealing with land, unless they were tipped off by having seen the titles first. One's initial impression is to categorize these works as Modernist abstractions in the lineage of Mondrian and Rothko. However, upon discovering their connection to particular places, it might be assumed that these are conceptual pieces directed by infrared satellite technology or other scientific data. Caporael indeed begins with a color-coding system derived from objective sources, and yet, does not confine herself to rigid prescribed formulas. Instead she allows formal considerations to adjust and

rearrange the initial information. The resulting amalgamation of abstraction, concept and intuition speaks to our longing for terra firma.

Instead of focusing on landscape as she frequently has in the past, Christina Hejtmanek, in her eight C-prints entitled, *Selections from 20 August, 2001*, trains her lens on the sky above. Selections were made during a residency at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX, permanent home to Donald Judd's vast body of minimalist stainless steel and massive concrete sculptures. The suggestion of Judd's ghost hovers in the serial nature and gridded installation of Hejtmanek's photographs. Where she establishes her own vision, is in the way she imparts the human presence

behind the camera. Judd wished to erase the hand of the artist while Hejtmanek generously shows us her hand. With the use of sun flaring off her lens, the artist creates compelling compositions out of what might normally be thought of as empty sky. Her eye is that of an aesthete with both feet planted firmly on the ground. Clouds, instead of serving as central subject matter, play a supportive roll,

often just barely peeking in at the edge of the frame. As with the other artists in this show, color sensibility is a strong aspect of her work. Hejtmanek has found some of the deepest ultramarine and juiciest cobalt blue rectangles of sky. Her photographs seem to suggest that in some parts of the country, at least in certain parts of Texas, one can still find a clear day.

— John Arndt and Barbara Wiesen  
Curators



*Sky Piece, Selections from 20 August, 2001, Marfa* by Christina Hejtmanek, 30" x 36.5", C-Print

**On a Clear Day**  
**Nov. 6 to Dec. 31, 2002**  
**Gahlberg Gallery**  
**[www.cod.edu/ArtsCntr/gallery.htm](http://www.cod.edu/ArtsCntr/gallery.htm)**  
**(630) 942-2321**

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