

# TIBOR DE NAGY

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Medrie MacPhee's "Take Me to the River" (2020), in her exhibition "Words Fail Me" at Tibor de Nagy

## Medrie MacPhee

About five years ago, Medrie MacPhee began to rethink her paintings. She jettisoned her swirling, unstable compositions, whose tangled forms, derived from architecture, often hung, Surrealist style, in empty space. She found, as many painters do as they mature, that she could do more with less. She started collaging parts of cutup garments to her canvases, fitting them together like puzzles, letting their welted seams define taut shapes that now extend edge to edge. She replaced a familiar illusionism with an adamant, witty physicality. In so doing, she dramatically improved her work and took ownership of it.

Four new canvases form "Words Fail Me," MacPhee's impressive second solo show with Tibor de Nagy. They are powerfully flat, more literal than abstract. Their compartments of color are alternately solid, slightly brushy or wiped down to a pale transparency. The familiar details function formally while providing little shocks of recognition: not only seams, but also belt loops, waistbands and the occasional zipper or pocket. In "Favela," belt-looped waistbands painted white divide blocks of red and brown; they are placed vertically, like ladders, which evoke the title and MacPhee's affection for architecture. In the majestic "Take Me to the River," the entire surface is a deep oceanic blue and the dividing seams are picked out in white. It suggests a sparsely lighted terrain seen at night, from above. But plenty of seams are left lurking in the blue, creating a ghostly infrastructure whose depths have a horizontal pull — perhaps out to sea.

ROBERTA SMITH