

HYPERALLERGIC

The Joys of Watching Paint Dry

In contrast to the speed and bravura of gestural abstraction, new.shiver slows time, and invites viewers to ponder how one might shape time passing.

By John Yau



new.shiver, "Full Moon Clouds (Cracked Sky Clouds)" (early 2000s to 2023), oil on canvas, 5 x 6 inches (all images courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York)

The Elders, the debut exhibition at Tibor de Nagy (April 20–May 26, 2023) of the anonymous artist new.shiver, follows on the artist's first, largely unheralded, similarly titled exhibition, *New.shiver: The Elders*, at Satchel Projects (April 21–May 22, 2022). After seeing this person's posts on Instagram, exchanging a handful of brief messages, and seeing the actual paintings at Satchel Projects and, now, Tibor de Nagy, I am taken by the artist's patience, which is not emphasized in the work. No overt signs of labor and struggle can be discerned in the exhibition's 20 intimately scaled works — all between 4 x 5 and 11 x 14 inches, composed of different densities of paint — which have a tangential relationship to gestural abstraction.

When I began thinking about the history of oil painting and the different ways the labor of mark making has been considered historically — from the artist’s touch to the level of their craftsmanship to the time it takes to complete a piece — I realized how these works challenge long-held viewpoints about these considerations. Since the rise of Abstract Expressionism, labor and process — the act of putting down and scraping away paint — has gone from being highly regarded to almost completely dismissed. With the rise of Pop Art in the early 1960s, the art world began to devalue the handmade in favor of the machine-made, and has since gone on to valorize entrepreneurship and outsourcing, neatly joining aesthetic principles to capitalist agendas. Whether we’re looking at Andy Warhol, Richard Serra, Jeff Koons, or Richard Tuttle, the removal of the artist’s hand and the downplaying of artisanship are central to the mainstream narrative.



new.shiver, “Leafing” (2022–23), oil and sand on panel, 8 x 10 inches

Both new.shiver and the paintings collectively titled *The Elders* subvert those long-held assumptions. According to the gallery press release:

Through a process of accretion the relief-like paintings give the sense that the works evolved over geological time, with atmospheric and physical forces at work. While continually evolving, the history of each painting is visible in its substructure. Undulating, earthy and smoldering colors accumulate until each painting is its own complex ecosystem. Time is an important factor in new.shiver’s work. These are long-process paintings, each work being returned to, and reworked, again and again. In the thickest paintings, each layer can take

months or years to dry enough to work with again. The continuous interruption and unpredictable wait times suspend the painting's trajectory ...

That suspension, and the artist's patience, are what make these paintings unique. Instead of aligning with the capitalist cliché about time-wasting, "it's like watching paint dry," the artist proceeds to do exactly that. "Sunder," which measures 5 x 4 inches, is dated "early 2000s to 2023," and others took years as well. Why did it take so long to make?

The layered formations and thick, brushstroke-like sections of paint in "Sunder" suggest the earth's strata. If two of Jackson Pollock's legacies are "paint as paint" and "truth to materials," new.shiver has pushed these in unexpected and challenging directions. In contrast to the speed and bravura often associated with gestural abstraction, new.shiver slows time in these works, and in doing so invites viewers to ponder how one might shape time passing. At the same time, the paintings' discernible strata and distinctly shaped forms convey multiple facets of paint's identity, from malleable to mineral-like. These works demonstrate that nothing is invincible.



new.shiver, "Grandma's Light" (2022–23), oil on canvas, 11 x 14 inches

An interplay between tonal and coloristic shifts as well as a bond between the optical and visceral are evident in the works, in their different marks, varying deposits of paint, and dissimilar combinations. The months and years it takes to make them are a celebration of time and its vagaries. The palette of blues, greens, browns, reds, and

yellows evokes nature, while the sensuous materiality of the paint suggests that time's pressure can be embraced. The topographic surfaces, with their malleable forms, convey a vulnerability that one rarely encounters in painting.

I was reminded of the work of Robert Ryman, who says, in Suzanne Hudson's book *Robert Ryman: Used Paint* (2009):

I thought I would see what would happen. I wanted to see what the paint would do, how the brushes would work. This was the first step. I just played around. I had nothing really in mind to paint. I was just finding out how the paint worked, colors, thick and thin, the brushes, the surfaces.

The paintings of new.shiver have a similar openness and sense of discovery. The works are simultaneously serious and spirited. As beautiful concentrations of time, they propose another way of living in time, one that is inherently anticapitalist and in that regard is a rejection of the art world's fixation with celebrity. Almost nothing is known about this anonymous artist's identity. The intimate scale of the paintings, the time it takes to make them, for which it is crucial to let thick layers dry before adding more paint, and the refusal to use one's identity as a platform — all of this further enhances a body of work that was a jubilation to discover.



new.shiver, "The Light Under" (2016–23), oil over acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches

The Elders continues at Tibor de Nagy Gallery (11 Rivington Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through May 26. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.