



julian hatton



shadowland, 2018-19, 10 x 10", oil on panel

front cover: *wishbone point*, 2018-19, 60 x 60", oil on canvas

julian hatton

bewilderness

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drift, 2018-19, 60 x 60", oil on canvas

BEWILDERNESS: JULIAN HATTON, RECENT PAINTINGS

Julian Hatton's recent paintings are tricky. They capture our attention with vibrant color and bold shapes, energy and apparent straight-forwardness. We are fascinated by the play of – say – citrus yellow, turmeric gold, off-beat purples, and slate blues, along with many less readily named hues. Then we are engaged by smaller incidents – patches, hatches, and lines – dancing against the generous zones of intense color. We focus on the range of paint applications, from loose and transparent to relatively controlled and opaque, from emphatic swipes to rhythmic strokes. That is, we initially read Hatton's paintings as abstractions. In part, this is because the intensity and clarity of his palette, which, like the unexpectedness of the hues he employs, are very far removed from our experience of our quotidian surroundings, even in blazing sunlight, even in idyllic settings. His assured, varied paint handling makes us mentally recapitulate the history of the painting's making. The very physicality of these paintings, the emphasis on the materiality of the medium and the presence of the artist's hand, cancel or at least subvert any implications of illusionistic space, making us consider their resonant color relationships as a two-dimensional, albeit pulsing, structure across the surface and rendering the clusters of energetic brush marks even more independent.

And yet, the more time we spend with these paintings, the more they reveal themselves as potent evocations of the natural world, even of specific places. There's nothing literal about Hatton's imagery – far from it – but if we pay attention to his free-wheeling compositions, we begin to read hovering diagonal planes as fields, meadows, and expanses of water, or interpret geometric planes parallel to the surface as rising ground or mountains. Assertive vertical lines and gestures begin to trigger thoughts of tree trunks. Urgent brushmarks suggest foliage and branches, while Hatton's vibrant hues demand to be associated with different seasons, times of day, and kinds of weather, even though we know, at the same time, that we have never encountered any place or quality of light that corresponds to the vibrantly chromatic countryside that we have decided we are seeing.

It is rather like the way we respond to Paul Gauguin's landscapes of Brittany, with their blazing yellows, saturated reds, and deep blues, and their collapsed, mutable space. We are aware that the Northern coast of France is a place of gray skies and chilly mists, but we are willing to believe that Gauguin's images are truthful or at least truthful to his feelings about a place that he found compellingly "primitive," with a way of life virtually unchanged since the Middle Ages.

I'm not suggesting that Hatton's paintings should be interpreted as metaphors for religious fervor, as many of Gauguin's Breton images were, or as symbolic in any way. But it's no accident that Hatton's recent works provoke thoughts of such modernist masters of color, inflected surfaces, and ambiguous space as Gauguin, Pierre Bonnard, or some of the German Expressionists. Hatton's paintings are entirely of this moment but at the same time, it's evident that he believes that the still vital tradition of painting is seamlessly connected to the past. That may be why we toggle between interrogating his pictures as lively abstractions and yielding to the many associations they provoke. The two readings do not cancel each other out, but reinforce one another. The instability of Hatton's imagery animates his paintings and keeps us alert. His titles, shifting among reference, abstraction, and ambiguity, similarly disturb our assumptions. Two words that come to mind: distillation and allusion.

Hatton's witty name for the series, "Bewilderness," perfectly expresses these multiple readings. It both embodies the origins of the paintings in his experience of the natural world and reminds us of his way of working, responding to what emerges, without preconception. And with its echoes of that wonderful Rogers and Hart song, it also connects us to the past and updates it. Most important, it captures those moments when a work of art compels and surprises us, challenging our expectations, keeping us off balance, and making us look with fresh eyes.

Karen Wilkin
New York, July 2019



beach, 2017-18, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



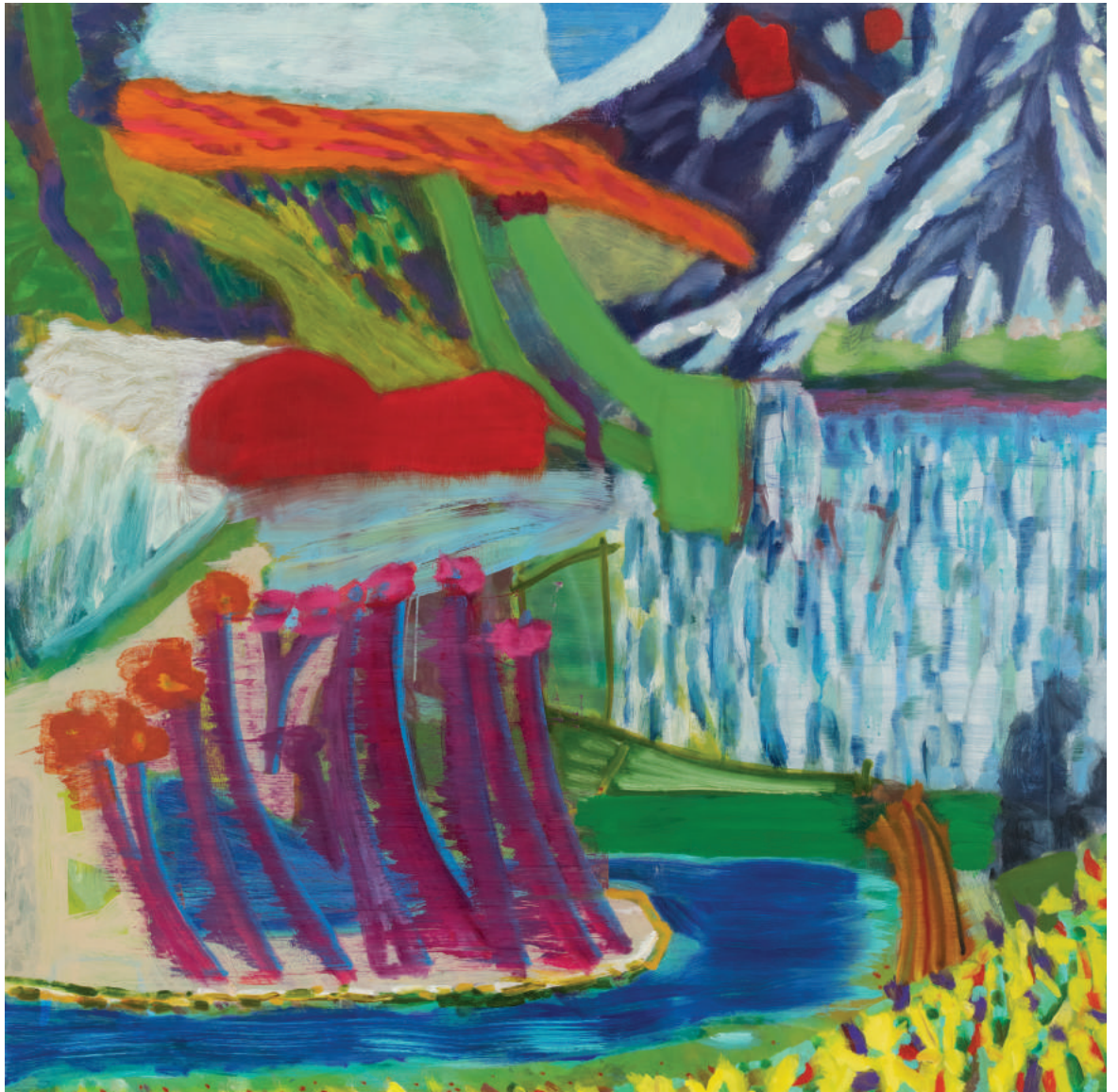
spring beauty, 2019, 10 x 10", oil on panel



spice, 2017-18, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



flow, 2018, 10 x 10", oil on panel



can't live without water, 2018-19, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



relationship, 2017-18, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



finch, 2017-18, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



inside the bloom, 2017-18, 10 x 10", oil on panel



early, 2017-18, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



nudge, 2018, 10 x 10", oil on panel



oso dormido, 2017-18, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



bewilderness, 2018, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



boomerang, 2018, 24 x 24", oil on canvas on panel



pot, 2018, 10 x 10", oil on panel



tamarack creek, 2019, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



streaming, 2018, 60 x 60", oil on canvas



sides, 2019, 10 x 10", oil on panel

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