

FineArtConnoisseur

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Hills by Siena, 2007, Oil on paper, 12 x 9 in., Collection of the Artist

Today's Masters Artists Making Their Mark:

Kathy Buist (b. 1959) makes paintings that appear—at first—more abstracted than those usually featured in Fine Art Connoisseur. Look again, and we begin to discern the water, mist, shores, fields, and hills that transition gently into the ethereal skies that dominate her images.

Buist's fascination with nature is lifelong, as she grew up on a flower farm in Allendale, Michigan, where her father taught her to camp and fish. It was her mother who encouraged her to paint and earn a BFA at the Kendall School of Design in nearby Grand Rapids. It took another 12 years, however, for Buist to pursue advanced studies at the Vermont Studio Center and New York Academy of Art, though she had been painting the whole time.

After school, she resides in Manhattan, but now paints primarily in a studio at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. There, by the Atlantic Ocean, the big sky is ever-changing, and Buist admits "there is nothing I love to do more than watch what nature does minute by minute." Though we cannot automatically differentiate landscapes in her oeuvre, Buist names pieces for their origins (e.g., Tuscany, Virginia), or for concepts on her mind as she works (Transcending, Day Break).

Whether she is sketching in watercolors and pastels outdoors, or painting in oils indoors, Buist seeks visual drama with forms that could be storms, waves, winds, or speeding clouds. "When I see a landscape," she notes, "I'm always trying to look beyond the structures into something more inward, more elemental." Not surprisingly, a favorite forerunner is another New Jerseyan, George Inness (1825-1894), whose Swedenborgian beliefs in the spirituality of nature informed his atmospheric, and mysterious, study of light's effects on color.

Complementing this are Buist's expressionistic methods of handling paint, which she mixes generously with medium. This material is then applied in sensual strokes with brushes (both ends), sticks, rags, or Buist's own hands—whatever seems most appropriate. Although the resulting effect infers speed and accident, her images are actually built up carefully in layers, and the positioning of vibrant colors near muted ones occurs only after close consideration. Buist's admiration of the thick, expressive surfaces of Chaim Soutine (1893-1943) makes perfect sense in this regard.

Buist's canvases range in length from 7 feet to 6 inches, though all scales pose challenges: "In the large works, it's preserving spontaneity and coherence. With the small ones, it's capturing the energy without confining it." Again and again, Buist makes it work, and in our era of growing concern about environmental fragility, her painted odes to nature are especially timely and welcome.

Buist is represented by Diana Ferrone Gallery (Laguna Beach, CA); Gallery Savarese (San Diego, CA); Lanoue Fine Art, (Boston, MA); Nabi Gallery (New York City); Sage Moon Gallery (Charlottesville, VA); Scott Frederick Gallery (Allenhurst, NJ); and Water Street Gallery (Douglas, MI).