

An abstract painting by Sigrid Burton, featuring a dense, layered composition of organic forms and textures. The color palette is dominated by deep reds, oranges, and purples, with vibrant accents of blue, green, and yellow. The brushwork is expressive and varied, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of complex, interconnected patterns that evoke natural or cellular structures.

MAKING LIGHT VISIBLE
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INVISIBLE INSTRUMENTS: ON SIGRID BURTON'S MAKING LIGHT VISIBLE

BY GEORGIA LASSNER

How is it that an artist can dedicate one, five, seven, ten years to a distinct work of art? So many iterations of burnt umber, rabbit skin glue, and oil stick; so many intimate encounters with the same piece of linen, stretched to the brink, inundated with paint strokes applied in every state of mind, temperature, and pressure, on every kind of day—from the suffocating, particulate heat of Los Angeles to the blindingly bright snow days of New York City. And still, a visitor to Burton's Pasadena studio won't be told, but instead, asked; what do *you* think?

Sigrid Burton's practice, while introspective and intimate, continues to propose painting as a question, a possibility, always with the specter of rawness. Not as an intellectual question, *per se*, not theoretical, but something inviting, empowering. Almost in defiance of her close encounters with Clement Greenberg's strict Modernism during her student years at Bennington College in the early 1970s, Burton's work doesn't resort to aesthetic taste or judgment. It's a proposition in and of itself, indicative of an unaffected position whose modesty veils its complexity: What do *you* think?



A frenetic and dedicated painter, passionate student of art history, and museum fanatic, Burton has always worked long hours, long years at her paintings, which begin as fluctuating, single-color surfaces applied over white oil ground and emerge, over time, as wild constellations in a chromatic universe. Flowers, netting, weeds, G's and Z's, a cat's tail, herringbone, all rendered as though flung from a luminous netherworld, a delicious mix of euphoria and chaos. They trap light in a fleeting, impossible way, not unlike the way a scene lingers beneath closed eyelids.

Burton's titles, also subject to change over time, offer another point of misty rumination and act as a sort of olive-branch for onlookers, tucking double meanings and points of inquiry into what can often be the austere, minimally language-ified field of abstraction. *Place of the Solitaires* (2021) is moody and dark, while a solar plexus beam of light seems to illuminate a frazzled core. Near the top of the painting, a cloud-smear of color feels like an exhalation, or one of Titian's clouds (Burton has been a Renaissance enthusiast since traveling Europe at the age of sixteen; though she practically grew up in the galleries of what is now the Norton Simon, imbibing the colorful abstractions of Kandinsky, Jawlensky, and Klee). *Solitaire* is rarely a word seen in plural, making it incongruous, uncomfortable. Completed during the pandemic, perhaps it refers to the new normal lifestyle of "alone together"—solitaires indeed. *An Observation of This Territory* (2021) also speaks to its moment—feverish and pink, busy, energetic but nervous, more an explosion than something carefully rendered. It cannot be contained.

What you won't find in Burton's list of materials is something we all possess, but none of us own. Of course, it's time itself. Burton's paintings point to the profound impermanence of all things—even art, even meaning—that all artworks change because we change. There is a special word—*pentimento*—for when an artist's long-ago original painting becomes visible beneath their current work. It comes from the Italian, which means, literally, repentance. For Burton, the *pentimento* is not an accidental phenomenon, but a deliberate unfurling. To view Burton's work is to embrace the possibility of a simultaneous past and present; to let go of our rigid perceptions of time, of art, and to see our own vulnerabilities not reflected, but refracted—as only light, captured, can do.



Place of the Solitaires, 2005-2021, oil on canvas, 39.5" x 31.5"



Horticulture, 2022, oil on linen, 30" x 30"



Tidal Variants #1, 2021-2022, oil on linen, 30" x 30"



Tidal Variants #2, 2018-2022, oil on canvas, 30" x 30"



Nocturnal Seas #2, 2022, mixed media on paper, 20.25" x 16"



Miss O's Mischief, 2020-2021, oil on linen, 50" x 40"



An Observation of This Territory, 2020-2021, oil on canvas, 60" x 60"



Travelogue #3, 2021, mixed media on paper, 22.5" x 16.5"



From Winter or a River, 2022, oil on linen, 36" x 36"

SIGRID BURTON



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The ineffable aspects of the sublime and the transcendental power of painting are the foundation of my practice. I believe painting concerns an interactive visual colloquy, providing a view to an interior dialogue and an immersive experience beyond the quotidian, much like a symphony engages the ear. I embed gestural abstractions of organic forms in chromatic atmospheric grounds, reflecting on ideas of space and depth, employing idiosyncratic mark making and the resonant use of color.

The daily experience of color, light and atmospheric phenomena is ephemeral. My intention is to make light and depth tangible and visible on a 2-dimensional picture plane, capturing the phenomenological occurrence of reflection and refraction of light. In particular, in water, sky and deep space, not in a literal sense, but drawing from the history of these concerns in works by artists such as Turner, Monet, Rothko. Color creates this atmosphere and elicits not only an emotional, but also a physiological response. In addition, since 1990, I have been engaged in an investigation of Indian art forms and aesthetic theory, including academic scholarship and extensive travel in the subcontinent. India has an ancient and sophisticated aesthetic theory which holds, broadly stated, that the importance of a work of art is the response that the work evokes from the viewer. Within this context, color is understood to have great expressive and communicative power. For me, color is sui generis ; it communicates in its own unique language.

My drawing and mark marking derive from the natural world, and refer to botanical and biological anatomies, including marine life, as well as, the structures of both macro and micro cosmologies, constellation diagrams, and alphabetic systems. The specific content is intended to be ambiguous, yet evocative, referencing light and spatial phenomena, a common language of forms, and a shared cross-cultural use of symbols.

For the last 9 years, my involvement at the Carnegie Observatories based near my home and studio in Pasadena has had a particular impact on my work. I have been attending lectures on developments in astronomy and astrophysics, and visiting observatories, including Las Campanas in Chile. These opportunities, including my exposure to the extraordinary visual imagery currently being generated from observations in deep space, have allowed me to expand my thinking about the exciting interrelations of micro and macrocosmic configurations - the unifying structures and forms of the world around us and beyond.



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