

I Heard a Fly Buzz

May 8–July 19, 2024

Opening May 8, 6-8 pm

in Burgess, Thomas Pihl, Howard Smith

Curated by Deric Carner

EFA Studios presents *I Heard a Fly Buzz*, an exhibition featuring three EFA Member Artists who conceive of abstraction in distinct ways. The experience of viewing abstraction can lead you to a formal analysis or questioning of the artist's biography and technique. Or incredulity that the artist has forsaken any sensible imagery. Here I invite you to pause and reflect on your own being, as you stand before works that are each finite and exact, and do not demand interpretation—though plenty are offered. What the works ask is quiet attention and an openness to letting go. Listen to the fly which buzzes with life, short that it may be.



Howard Smith, *Orange Above*, 2021

Howard Smith, who has been a member of the Studio Program since 2000, makes paintings that explore brush strokes and grid structures. His practice connects to abstract expressionism in its foundation as an embodied practice of applying paint as a trace of the artist's action. His paintings are developed in grouping or families of works, which are continued over many years, delving into variations of color, shape, and stroke. His paintings slowly unfold for the viewer, inviting us to examine the movement and energy of each painting in relation to the group and the walls that hold them. Smith is minimal in his approach to painting, focusing on continual mark-making across surfaces and time.

Thomas Pihl is a Norwegian-born artist who has been in New York City since 1994 when he came for graduate school. He is known for his minimalist color field paintings with lush glowing edges and light-filled centers. Equally intriguing are his drawings that explore form and presence in a looser manner. His paintings are often dramatic and seductive, but trouble viewers with their emphatic denial of representational subject matter. The smooth frosted surface belies their elaborate



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handmade production. They could be “about light and opacity” however, like Howard Smith's paintings, they are most impactful when the viewer confronts existential questions like: Who am I, standing in front of this formation pointing only to itself? Or, can I let go of my material needs and ego and exist within this painting?

Coming from a conceptual installation and photographic background, m Burgess uses small format painting as a way to circumvent language and as a means of letting go into direct experience. The works on paper are not made with a result in mind nor are they expected to be interpreted in a strictly visual or verbal manner. These abstractions are teeming with indexical content and materials linked to the artist's awareness while painting. Listening to birds and trees and rivers as they work is as important to them as the sounds made by the human voice. Rather than rejecting content, the paintings absorb a surfeit of references and connections to the living world. The viewer is left to buzz over territories that lack a fixed orientation or legend.

In sharp contrast, a set of vertically stacked white letterforms spells out a message to be read from the ground upwards: EARTH AS WITNESS. Sprouting from the letter “W” and read horizontally are the words, “WET LIGHT.” By providing the illusion of a direct statement, Burgess relies upon ambiguities of interpretation to draw upon the abstract qualities of language.

Emily Dickinson's poem *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died*, referenced in the show's title, is about the weightiness of death contrasted by the flighty transcendence of a fly buzzing about a deathbed. Tears and the practical matters of inheritance are interrupted by the seemingly pesky fly, the buzz perhaps an irritating final experience. Or the fly is a reminder of the joyous, senseless energy that confounds our existence.

For all inquiries, please contact Deric Carner at deric@efanyc.org.



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