

VALERIE HEGARTY

NATURE'S METHODIC AND UNPREDICTABLE FURY

Written by Matthew Bedard



"George Washington Shipwrecked," 2007. Foamcore, canvas, paper, paint, paste, medium-density fibreboard, gel medium, 39" x 33" x 4".

OPPOSITE: Installation view of "Landscaping" at Guild & Greyshkul, 2005. "Driftwood Painting," 2006. Foamcore, paper, paint, glue, gel medium, plastic buckets, and wood, 59" x 67" x 16".



This growth works on a "linear path," often alchemically dissolving and re-mixing the nuances of historic paradigms, but Hegarty remains sensitive to the principles of their foundation. "I'm pulling from established sources—like early American landscape painting, which was about new identity and the limitless potential of the land and promise—and trying to come out with something more contemporary, while exploring these ideas of manifest destiny, which are still out there, but have taken different forms." Like Octavio Paz or José Saramago, whom she "more readily aligns with than another artist or art movement," Hegarty's re-shaping convention and instilling promise in the place of vacancy.

"George Washington Shipwrecked" emits the mutative energy of this disintegration. "Out of the rubble, there is a desire for things to change, and not just physically change," Hegarty says. "Now maybe there are trees growing out of the painting, or a new form, almost like these shards on the ground are seeds for a hundred new paintings."

Hegarty describes the current art and political climate as difficult, but liberating. Though the global demand contraction—curbed speculation, closed galleries, and fewer shows—has forced her to seek additional employment, her lessened studio time has favorably become more methodic. She's also been inspired to teach underprivileged teens at the Brooklyn Museum. "Before all this, all of my time was spent making work sold right out of my studio to collectors. I felt uninspired and burned out. Now that I'm out in the world doing the daily grind, I realize how special making and looking at art is. It's such a sacred human activity at its core, removed from the art market and just looked at as a form of human inquiry."

When asked if she feels the outcome of this inquiry is thematically pertinent, she concludes: "People seem to really respond to the aggression and the energy, the forcefulness in the action of things being ripped or burned. There's an attraction to that kind of energy, a shock or surprise, which is perhaps pertinent to the emotion in the world at the moment. My work is fractal, broken down, but designed to grow like a crystal." ☐

On first impression, New York artist Valerie Hegarty's work—canvases splintered by tree branches, rot-riddled furniture, twisted, burned, dilapidated objects and spaces—depicts brutal, abject chaos and decay. Yet, she suggests there's a palpable growth and optimism in her distinctive reconfigurations. "There's a creation and embedding of transformative energy in destruction," she explains. "Things have to break down before something new can occur."

Closer inspection of her compositions' component parts—foamcore, wood, canvas, wire, paper, gel, sand, and tape—reveal deliberate human agency. But clearly, Hegarty is purposefully removed. "I'm simulating a process where nature is the artist, trying to create a more accurate representation of what the world looks like now," she says. "I feel there's more veracity behind nature's manipulation of the work than a human's. There's growth, but you don't know where it's going." For Hegarty, the implementation of nature—both unpredictable and regenerative—inspires possibility. And as natural decomposition eliminates dead elements and recycles others, she too is enabling room for growth.

For more information, visit NicelleBeauchene.com.

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"Unearthed," 2008. Wood and mixed media, 36" x 22" x 10".



"Chest of Drawers (Early American) with Woodpecker," 2007. Foamcore, paper, paint, wood, glue, gel medium, saw dust, 93" x 52" x 26.5".



"Niagara Falls," 2007. Foamcore, paper, paint, wood, glue, gel medium, 150" x 300" x 65".



"Overseas (Fireplace with Harpoons)," 2006. Foamcore, paper, paint, glue, and gel medium, 118.1" x 94.5" x 94.5".