

# Shawn Skeir – Landscapes of Simultaneity

**John K. Grande**

Shawn Skeir's process as a painter is less narrative than an act of building visibility in a way that resembles a musical score. These paintings are very visual. The visual painterly sequencing that builds in a single painting is a language, a kind of visual phonetics more about the phrasing of these landscape formats, each a variation juxtaposed with the others. The inter-relatedness of these "landscapes" within a painting, is about the act of painting more than landscape as a subject for art. Skeir's painted series DNA Landscapes and Weaving Landscapes reveal the artist's ongoing development from the abstract paintings and the figurative studies he experimented with earlier on through to these new fusion styles that are much closer to a pulse than those earlier painterly idioms.

## **WEAVING LANDSCAPES**

Skeir's Weaving Landscapes paintings go a lot further than merely painting as object / landscape as subject. The tactile character of his paintings as process offset the optics and near graphic visibility of his compositions. Introducing visual and coloristic variations that have affinities with the pure plastic Op art of the 1960s, they still maintain a near acoustic handle on the depth and variation of these multiform "representations" of landscape.

Skeir brings a very visceral interpretive style to these landscape series and this is what makes Skeir's art so interesting. We visually read the paintings in a way that challenges our presumptions of what a landscape is or potentially could be. Skeir builds painterly sequences, and never abandons chance or variation, for these variations play with ways of conceiving visibility, for Skeir is not "designing" a painting per se.

Instead he offers us a relativity whereby we can read the painting as we go, choosing where and what to register, to return again and re-read the visuals, each of them conceivably conceivably a landscape, but a landscape that originates in abstraction. These landscapes, each mini-formatted, is a projection, something we can ascribe with the standard horizon line, or the foreground, background elements, but they exist as situational events in each painting as process more than anything else.

What works in any of these Weaving Landscape paintings is the painting. Upsetting our assumptions, our familiarity as to what a reading of a painting can be, Shawn Skeir offers us a mirror to our own innate (primordial?) perceptual gear, the way we see and perceive, and then turns the soil of the painterly earth yet again so we read the "place" of these paintings – the canvas surface. This re-inventing of painting builds on earlier generations of painters' work. These paintings are landscapes by title, but the series of painterly effects that build a work, playing from surface to depth cause us to question what it is we are actually perceiving. The mystery that results is delightful. In this way the Weaving Landscapes are a distant cousin to Chuck Close's large scale portrait paintings. Skeir remains stylistically visceral, textural, less meditative...



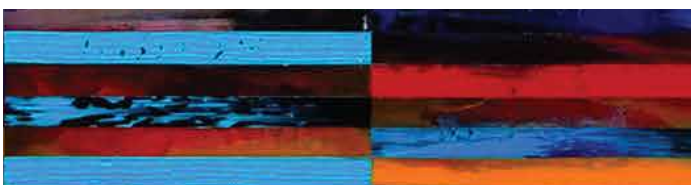
'Weaving Landscape No.21'  
acrylic on wood panel  
48 x 48 inches

Our eyes are fixed on the event of perception . The optical and perceptual immediacy Skeir achieves suggests patterns, rhythms that resonate as we respond to these paintings' physicality. We still look into them, and read a landscape. The landscape is not a landscape per se, but more a challenge to the comfort zones of art, whether abstract or figurative. The process begets a process that turns it all around and we look anew. The Weaving Landscapes are more like continuous bands or strips of color and variation they continue the length of the canvas. We do not read then visually as left to right or vice versa, but as a presence, a presence that reinvents the painted canvas continuum and way we conceive of landscape as painted object. The interweaving of colour sequences each a "landscape" recalls Sonia and Robert Delaunay's Orphism - a synthetic style of painting. Originally it was Apollinaire who coined the term, but painting went in another direction with the Delaunays. And much like the Delaunay's Orphism but in another world, Shawn Skeir gives colour a way of being - in patches of colour – colour landscapes - he weaves together as compositions. To create compositions that express rhythms of life, and more universal energies but in a language linked to optical effect as much as tactile immediacy, Skeir keeps a balance. He holds the tactile, conceives it into miniature landscapes, as comparatively sequences full of those details, the biographical painterly allusions - splash, brush, merge, fuse, move, brush, paint, merge, fuse...

The early 20th century Delaunay's simultaneity visually expressed how far off events can come together simultaneously in art and design and like these artists Skeir can recreate multi-sensory elements in a single context that merges time and space. Shawn Skeir's approach causes us to question what our visual reading of "events" that could be called landscapes, and in so doing actually redefines painting as process more than anything else.



Above: 'DNA Landscape No.6', acrylic on wood panel, 48 x 48 inches. Below: a detail image of 'DNA Landscape No.6'.



## A VISUAL EMBODIMENT OF A PAINTING PROCESS

The contents merge a series of surface events. We read the brush work, the accretions of paint, and bands and swaths of surface to be what actually is – a multitude of landscape. It is the element of chance that Skeir plays with, while building an inter-related rhythm, of painted sequences or rectangles, that builds as near musical character to his compositions. He plays with the notion of what a painting is or could be. And he reinvents paintings, turns the subject on its head, and then brings it back to us as we expected or hoped it could be.

## DNA LANDSCAPES

Within the DNA Landscapes each painted "event" we are presented with is a close-up microcosmic reification of the act painting as "event". Indeed we read each scene as we would a landscape, but with a simultaneity of many scenes arranged in strips, they are actually about the act of painting,

and the event of art, processes more abstract than reproductions of a scene. This builds a tension into the work.

We ourselves are sites, and we work with places, in places, live in it all, and as site specific beings we bring an awareness to the site of an artwork. The geometric pattern of the “DNA Landscapes” for instance allows for limitless variations in texture and colour, and by extension each painting becomes a unique environment that immerses the viewer in its ambiguous and evocative depths.

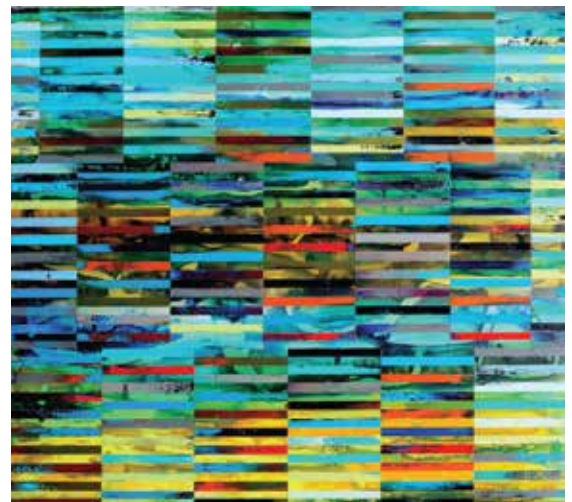
The DNA Landscapes are very visual. The sequencing and variations carry a feeling of time, not time passed, but of time itself. Each of the painted rectangular pieces carries an altogether different cadence of light, of process, of painting as a place itself that stands outside and beyond the so called subject the landscape – the sequencing builds a narrative of experience and the dialogue is between the viewer and the sequences we move into. Drawn into each of these we feel neither an abstract nor a figurative sensibility. It is more about the way color, fields of vision, horizons potential or realized all merge to give a sense that visuality is a perceptual extension of the way our mind works. The process sweep of paint, or ink-like splotch, the undulations in paint make these processes of painting Shawn Skeir is involved with a recreation of nature’s inherent processes with all the variation, the accident, the unexpected circumstance.... Color is the binder, it brings a sense of time, not as memory but as actuality.

Instant worlds...

The paintings build instant worlds, worlds within worlds, and each is relative to the others... not in sequence but as variations of experience the painter brings to life. He turns the paint of art and history like soil, reawakens the visual moment, for time changes the way we see things and what was a way of seeing is now a variation of seeing, and the function of landscape as metaphor for Skeir is in its familiarity, the essential eternal horizontality, the way we perceive is similar, coded a response to genetics even, or experience as we inherit it with the bio-built mechanism of body and perception.

Why DNA? DNA is double stranded, and DNA stores biological information on how life forms are made and exist. The DNA double helix carries genetic coding that instructs the multi-variate staging of living organisms. The double-strands of DNA carry identical biological information that is replicated as the strands separate. Most DNA (over 98% for humans) is not coding and does not serve as protein sequence patterns. Shawn Skeir alludes to DNA because the narratives he paints are post-linear, bio-rhythmic, and the sequences of visuality he presents us with are as much about the body as they are about what a landscape is or could be. The color variations have resonance of graphic intuition to them, and could recall Josef Albers or

Victor Vasarely’s art, but only as distant more pure plastic cousins from times past. Here the textural is textual and the visual way he “writes” as painting is a kind of coding, a language as intimately linked to life as early writing.



‘DNA Landscape No.7’  
acrylic on wood panel  
48 x 42 inches

The DNA paintings do not decide for us how to read them. We can read them right to left, up to down, or from the bottom to top, or even diagonally, and like ancient scripts or tablets they carry a lot of visual information, a kind of “writing” that runs the paint like soil, turns it over thematically so we have to respond in the here and now. In the moment of perception we feel Shawn Skeir’s DNA Paintings hang outside history in the dormers between abstraction and visual figuration, as Skeir reinvents and turns the subject over and over, synthesizing the process on a revolving spit of recognition,. Bringing painting into a new world of immediacy, in a spatial bodily way Shawn Skeir links us to the land, if only in enhancing our awareness of the visual, tactile, presence and perspectives he presents. For the land is as much a body as ours are, and the painter works between outer and inner worlds, embodying presence and absence simultaneously – with simultaneity. ■



Top: 'Lake To Sky (DNA Landscape No.19)', acrylic on wood panel, 141.25 x 54.75 inches. Bottom Right: 'DNA Landscape No.24', acrylic on wood panel, 48 x 48 inches. Bottom Left: A detail photograph of 'DNA Landscape'.

John K. Grande’s recent books include Nils-Udo; Sur l'Eau (Actes Sud, France, 2015), Bob Verschueren; Ecos de la Memoria (Valencia, Spain, 2016), In) Formation – Alice Teichert Recent Paintings (Hirmer Verlag, Germany, 2017) and Art Space Ecology (Black Rose/ University of Chicago, 2018). His writings have been published in Artforum, Vice Versa, British Journal of Photography, Public Art Review, Ciel Variable, LensCulture, On Paper, Arte.Es, Art Review (UK), Border Crossings, Public Art Review (USA), Sculpture Magazine (USA) and Landscape Architecture (USA). He curated Small Gestures at the Mucsarnok / Kunsthalle, Budapest, Hungary in 2016.