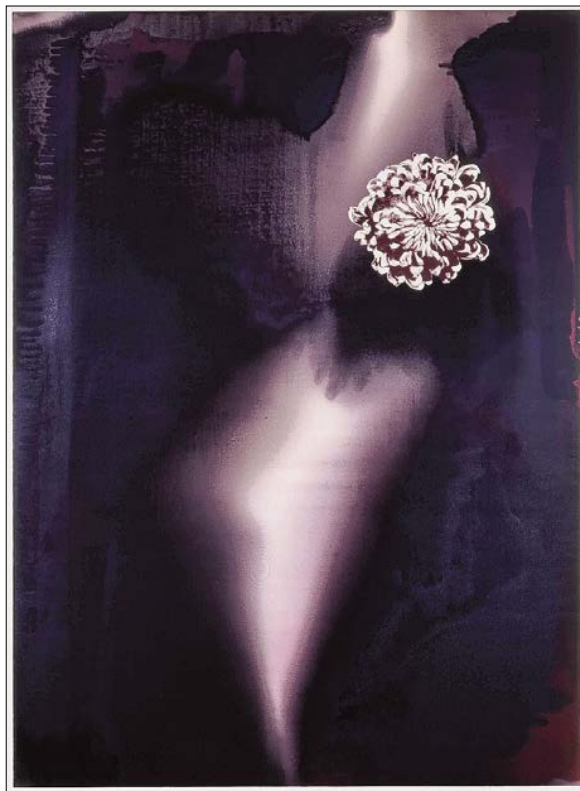


ARTS



Fredrik Nilsen Studio
Mary Weatherford, "Lovely Day," 2015. Flashe and neon on linen.



Mary Weatherford, "Third Riddle," 1991. Acrylic and Flashe on canvas

VISUAL ART

Drawn to the glowing light

Tang's Mary Weatherford retrospective worth seeing for more than her famous neon works

By William Jaeger

Like neon, so I jumped at the chance to see the huge paintings in "Mary Weatherford: Canyon-Daisy-Eden" with their searing neon accoutrements in full glory at the Tang.

And they really are big, gorgeous in color, and richly athletic with their swooshes of abstraction straight from Helen Frankenthaler and Joan Mitchell. A work like "Ruby I (Thrifmart)" lords over you with a layered, raggedy rectangular shape that hints at all kinds of rich colors oozing from a shadowy darkness. Imagine taking tissue paper that is 10 feet across and sloppily tossing it on a lightbox until it goes darker and darker, leaving an undulating gray mass with edges that still show their original hues.

Then add a very slightly crooked shaft of neon tubing from top to bottom, along with a single draped electrical wire almost parallel to it (over, not under, the painting). Up close, the orangey light from the tube glares in a magnetic way. Farther back, the light and painting merge.

"Canyon" uses the same tricks. A layering of luminous earthy reds and yellows creates a light patchwork of brushed marks that build, with a few hints of blue, into a rectangular presence. Over this a pair of glowing tubes cuts across part of the bottom, searing that swath of the painting.

Weatherford, still active in Los Angeles,

has three decades of work on view. And she ticks off all the right boxes: Princeton to Bard, then a stint at the Whitney. She's now represented by Gagosian. The work is naturally impressive and loaded with influences.

The glowing tube artworks are inevitably focal points here, but there are other strong paintings. "Night and Day" is simple, with a plain pink sky like an oppressive orb over a dark blue background. A silkscreen image of a woman bent forward holding her head in her hands is applied over this in harsh yellow and orange. There is no brushwork here, just big areas of color; the figure a neon-like counterpoint. The work shouts its despair.

Some other pieces struck me as hesitant, or even gimmicky, like the large pale blue "10.26," which has a few actual starfish attached to the lifeless surface. Then there is the wall of 27 misfit paintings that probably wouldn't fully engage individually and certainly struggle en masse.

But then turn to the beautiful large screenprint/painting called "Her Clairvoyance," which creates an ambiguous underwater or night scene, all dark blue and black, surprisingly subdued. And look closely at what might be the masterpiece

Fredrik Nilsen Studio
Mary Weatherford, "Ruby I (Thrifmart)," 2012. Flashe and neon on linen.

Please see **WEATHERFORD 9** ▶





Mary Weatherford, "Her Insomnia," 1991. Flashe and silkscreen ink on canvas

WEATHERFORD

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of the show, the imposing "Third Riddle" where a screenprinted flower punctuates a complex, dark mass of deep gray-browns and blacks that seems almost like a rising storm at night. It's ominous and seductive.

This is as strong a retrospective as Weatherford might expect at this point in her career. There is a full range of work on view, and it's been given the volume it needs in the Tang's main first-floor gallery. It does,

If you go:

"Mary Weatherford: Canyon-Daisy-Eden"

■ **Where:** Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs

■ **When:** Through July 12

■ **Hours:** Tues-Sun 12- 5 p.m., Thursday until 9 p.m.

■ **Admission:** Free

■ **Info:** <https://tang.skidmore.edu/exhibitions/255-mary-weatherford-canyon-daisy-eden> or 518-580-8080

however, suffer a corporate-ready blandness.

For all the bluster of

her press information (including interviews and Gagosian releases), the works can wind up all too calculated. Even the best works can be seen as decorative, even if very ambitious. They are imitations of more original and deeply felt art. This is especially evident when the brushwork gives the appearance of expressiveness and yet the result remains intentional, as if the brush is being told what to do for impersonal, ornamental reasons.

I suppose the works might remain progressive in a post-contemporary way.

Or maybe they do, as some writers imply, rewrite art history in feminist terms. I'm more convinced by the direct effects, the simple beauty of the more involved paintings, because here the results are inarguable. And understood with force in the gallery, first-hand.

► *William Jaeger is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.*