

Of Earth and Sky

by Lilly Wei

In a transition from her earlier production, the evocative images in Rachelle Krieger's luminous new paintings are based on equally evocative satellite images. The series slips effortlessly between the abstract and the representational, between the factual and the poetic in exhilarating shifts of perspective that change everything.

Krieger, constantly challenging herself and as a starting point for this body of work, posed a question: How can the invisible be portrayed? In this series, including, as part of it, "Rocks and Rays," the invisible means the forces that swirl around us and affect our lives—from currents of wind and water to magnetic fields to patterns of solar radiation and other natural phenomena. Captured routinely by new technologies, they are of immense topical interest as climate change and other environmental issues have become increasingly urgent concerns.

As part of that desire to challenge herself, she switched to raw linen for "Rocks and Rays" in 2015, although the works from 2014 were still executed on wood panel, a support she had used for some time. In working with both kinds of surfaces, she could play with an even greater variety of brushstrokes, the results depending upon whether it was linen or wood, two very different kinds of grounds upon which to spin her aerial and terrestrial fantasias. It also allowed her to achieve different qualities of color and light as she modulated degrees of opacity and translucency, brightness and darkness in response to the material of the support.

Krieger is engrossed in painting's processes, in its chemistry, in experimenting with formulations of pigment, binders, and so on. And the subtle friction, even irony, in shaping high-tech images by means of the oldest of pictorial means does not escape her. She obviously adores the viscosity of oil paint, its smell and grittiness, and how it can be transformed from the earthy and muddied into the breathtakingly diaphanous, something that has seduced artists and viewers alike for centuries, even millennia. A natural colorist, Krieger's handling of paint is a pleasure to look at.

The works brim with different hues but subtly so, rich but not garish, extra colors almost stealthily added at times, tucked into a corner, hidden beneath another stroke, breaking through to the surface, floating on top. The palette is earth-toned, warm, embracing, in "Rocks and Rays," but lighter in other works such as *Ode to the Humboldt Current* (2014), flushed with a stream of oceanic blue, a color she uses often and well, *Gravitational Pull II* (2014), displaying an elegant exchange between yellows and greys, two other favored colors, and *Spring* (2015), as lyrical as it sounds. Imagining the Interconnect-edness of *All Things* (2013), however, with its glowing greys, beautiful yellows and tender lavenders, canopied by loops of black bands, the brushwork sweeping and staccato, is perhaps her vision at its most generous, most expansive. Buoyed and burnished with a lilting sense of joy, Krieger shares with viewers her universe, her private dreamscapes, her undimmed hopes for a beleaguered world.

Lilly Wei is a New York-based art critic and independent curator.