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# LITTLE PATUXENT REVIEW

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## Guiding Flow, The Paintings of Christopher Quirk

In what some call accident, others take an opportunity to orchestrate. For the most part, artists, taught to draw, render and build from technique, pick up a brush or spatula, and, with the mechanics of gesture, guide color and line, shape and image. Likeness or abstraction results. It is a human accomplishment, most often purposeful, intended. In the work of Christopher Quirk, one immediately recognizes something else at hand, something akin to a dependence on accident. Actually, more a manipulation of it.

There are flows, drippings, migrations of color, shape, line, space. Often, it is as if the paint itself has done the drawing, the paint in collaboration with things like gravity, with the hours or days a work has been left to its own devices, even with material consistency and chemical reaction. But then one becomes aware of the images as pictures, their overall effect as art: There is balance, drawing, wit and consideration; there is more than just accident. There is discovery and use of discovery. It's been orchestrated and the result is striking, beautiful, even deep.

“To make my paintings, I employ forms that may bring to mind biological, cartographic, bodily or geological elements. I juxtapose them in silvery or latticed fields to create a web of possible associations and relationships that are both suggestive and subject to change. The images are at times obscure, even to me, and the paintings gestate for weeks or months—the products of a dynamic, contemplative process of drawing, composing, improvising and refining.”

Until fairly recently, the last I remembered of Chris Quirk—this was years ago when he lived in Columbia and we were close friends—was that he was going to go learn how to paint rain with a stick, probably in the spirit of Van Gogh. It was about the time we had both finished with Oakland Mills High School and were ready for the world, or perhaps a little later after we had had some college under our belts and were more intently ambitious, determined. It took me years to catch up to him again, I found him through his paintings, works that had grown far beyond the rudiment of making marks with a stick. An evolution had taken place.

## PROFILE | CHRISTOPHER QUIRK

“I began painting abstractly from the first moment I picked up a brush,” Quirk says. “I immediately recognized it as a way of making the subtle ideas, perceptions and nuances of our interior life concrete.”

He now divides his time between Brooklyn and Hudson, NY, and his work, in solo or group exhibits, has appeared in galleries across the United States as well as in Italy. He has an MFA in painting from the Tyler School of Art, Rome, Italy and Philadelphia.

He explains that he had developed a keen interest in residual marks, like coffee stains or, in his studio, paint splashes or the mark a messy can bottom rings on a surface, marks ‘ambiguous regarding their origin.’ “They had a kind of authority, that of an unselfconscious activity, that a gesture in a painting could not.”

Quirk established processes or the beginnings of processes from which he could embark to incorporate this kind of ‘unselfconscious’ drawing into his work. Things that can be set up and allowed to happen, things that are responsible for much in the final images.

“The fluid leaves no human mark,” he states, making an effort to get away from the controlled work artists typically create. “I have looked for ways to apply paint that do not leave a particular kind of mark, a personal gesture.”

This type of making, while taking overt evidence of the artist’s hand out of the picture, requires other levels of guidance to create images that seem, well, unguided. It is in the controlled arrangement and maintenance of uncontrolled processes that the visual surface of the work comes into being.

“I think things that look like they got there for other reasons than the pure intent of a human have a different kind of authority and presence that interests me.”

Quirk’s goal as an artist, in a sense, is to keep himself out of the picture as much as possible. He has done that, in respects to traditional mark making. But, in that absence, one becomes aware of his presence, his skill and ability to guide the random nature of things like fluidity.

In front of a work for the first time, one can’t help but question things in their making, like the way stains drift. One must puzzle about contradictions of gravity, of the way we know things to work. Then, one puts down the human compulsion to interpret and starts to see that the images have their own rhythm and movement, terrains of form and color,

## PROFILE | CHRISTOPHER QUIRK

landscapes that betray a mastery over happenstance.

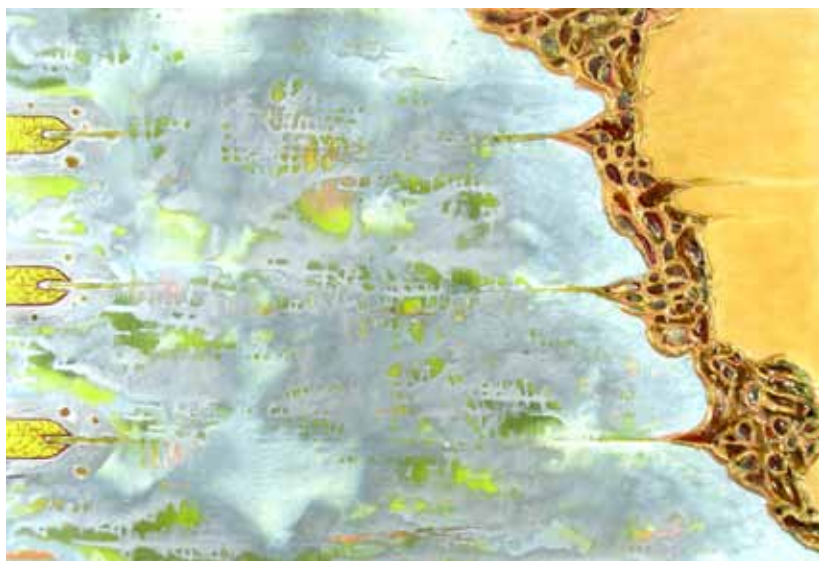
These works depend on a lot that can't be controlled in the way art is typically made. When all that 'out of control,' that accident, settles into place as 'residue,' Christopher Quirk has made arresting artworks, quite beautiful and captivating.

—Tim Singleton



Christopher Quirk  
**Prolepsis**

*Oil, acrylic and metallic paint on canvas over panel, 2006*



Christopher Quirk

13 May

*Oil, alkyd, acrylic and metallic paint on canvas over panel, 2009*



Christopher Quirk

10 May

*Oil, acrylic, pencil, metallic paint and sand on canvas over panel, 2009*



Christopher Quirk

**4 April**

*Oil, acrylic, metallic paint and sand on canvas over panel, 2009*



Christopher Quirk  
30 September

*Oil, acrylic, metallic paint and sand on canvas over panel, 2009*



Christopher Quirk

**I Ask You**

*Oil, acrylic and spray paint on paper mounted on panel, 2006*



Christopher Quirk

24 April

*Oil, acrylic and metallic paint on canvas over panel, 2009*