

Bill Hudders, *Easton Irregular Art Profile*, Oct 2011

I met with “William (Bill) Hudders” in his studio in the Karl Stirner Building to talk about his new painting “Bushkill Creek.” We also looked at landscape and still life paintings he pulled from the storage rack. Bill has lived in Easton, New York and Bethlehem; received his BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and MFA from the University of PA in Philadelphia. He currently teaches drawing and painting at Seton Hall University In New Jersey and drawing at Northampton Community College. He has taught as an adjunct faculty member at the Parsons’ New School and at Lafayette and Moravian Colleges. He has been in numerous solo and group shows and received a Pollack Krasner Grant in 2007.

“Bushkill Creek” reproduces the deep space of a particular spot under Route 22 using large and small puzzle-piece abstract shapes, one-shot brushstrokes and a palette limited to naturalistic color. By contrasting dark and light, cleanly separated, patches of yellow, green, reddish brown and near black, Hudders achieves a simple, organized view of nature. Hudders cites Neil Welliver and Fairfield Porter as influences, painters who heavily edited information from their paintings. Welliver stressed that color must appear to be “right” even if the mixed color was incorrect.

According to Bill, “Porter’s work showed me the way to use light as a compositional element and a descriptive device, simultaneously....then I started to see this same thing happening in painters as diverse as Vermeer and Cezanne.” For Hudders, perception during painting is primary, he battles happily with “the confusion of the material world,” and marvels at how “stuff presents itself differently as soon as you start to paint it.” True to the process of observation, Bill works from nature or the still life, not from photographs. He’s interested in how the act of painting collaborates with image making in the mind.

I was surprised to hear Bill say he was such a big fan of Phillip Guston, given that: Guston’s work is cartoonish, where Bill favors the realistic; Guston embraces story and drama and Bill edits out human presence; also, Guston chooses imagined, sometimes lurid and unsettling colors where Hudders records the natural palette. Bill tells me he sympathizes with Guston’s struggle of paint verses the image. This was apparent when he showed me the White Shirt paintings, still life studies of a rumpled, white shirt done in the studio on rainy days. Bill works up sophisticated, monochromatic compositions, carefully tweaking tints of white toward warm or cool, modeling smooth, strange, alabaster folds of cloth, which also read as mountains covered with sand or snow. The viewer travels with ease in, out

and around the folds of material, seeing imaginary forms emerge and disappear, much in the way that Leonardo amused himself staring at a stain in plaster. Yet we return to the solid world once the eye encounters a button, a line of stitches, a cuff, or a collar.

Conveying a radiant and tactile sense of light is the most important success for Bill Hudders. The light that falls on Easton and on objects in his studio is pale, weightless and airy. Somewhere between the Hudson River School and Pop Art, Bill's paintings capture reflected river light, the humid air that hangs on summer days, the light between trees and damp canal, or light held in clouds. The Pop Art part recalls Alex Katz, only a bit looser or more thickly painted. Contrasting light or dark, colored, flat, abstract shapes to make punchy compositions, Bill simplifies our local land, river and atmospheric conditions to luminous effect.

— Elizabeth Johnson