

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Gregory Volk, "Maureen Gallace," *Art in America*, December 8, 2015

Art in America

Maureen Gallace



In comparison with numerous nearby exhibitions featuring sizable, attention-grabbing works, Maureen Gallace's show of 12 small, oil-on-panel landscapes and seascapes was a refreshing, deeply compelling anomaly. These new paintings, none measuring more than 10 by 13 inches, revisit coastal New England—the ocean with its different colors, contours and moods; the expansive sky with its subtle tones and shifting clouds; beaches and beach houses; local flora, including flowers and shrubs; empty roads next to the ocean—which has long been both subject and muse for Gallace, who grew up in southern Connecticut. Evenly spaced around the gallery's four walls, Gallace's paintings formed a wraparound horizon line of sorts, disclosing images of liminal places where land meets sea,

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and where signs of the human (although no people are depicted) appear in relation to the vast ocean and sky.

Gallace distills things to their essences, often by incorporating aspects of abstraction. Prominent monochromatic planes form houses and barns. *Cloud on a Beach* (2015) presents the ocean, sky and sand not in elaborate detail but as a flat field of horizontal blue, white and tan striations that bridges distances and depths. Austere, but always complex, these paintings call for patient and thoughtful absorption.

Gallace works wonders with her spare means. In *September 1st* (2014), just a few dabs and quick strokes of differently hued paint (mostly greens) yield oddly tumultuous, even threatening, bushes and trees, surrounding, but also encroaching on, a somber gray house and garage. The sky in *Surf Road* (2015) is a minimalist mesh of various blues and whites. In the foreground are flowers, a curving gray road framed by tawny sand, a gray telephone pole and a blue patch of ocean. A white barn and telephone pole—both seem to have gathered and absorbed the white of the clouds—are luminous and ethereal, and make this otherwise tranquil scene unsettling and uncanny.

In these paintings, familiar, banal scenes often appear mysterious. With *Beach Shack, Door August 14th* (2015), you look at a gray beach shack but also right through its front door to the ocean and sky—this shelter is implicated in vastness. Omission is important for Gallace. There are no signs of life anywhere in this painting, no beach toys, umbrellas or barbecue grills. Instead, the shack is isolated and lonely. However, its bright white gables and white doorframe have an intense glow; enveloped by nature, the humble, vulnerable structure seems lit up with almost supernatural energy.

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Gallace connects with 20th-century painters like Edward Hopper and Fairfield Porter, but even more pertinently with a 19th-century nature-based sublime in New England. Like Luminist painters Fitz Henry Lane and Martin Johnson Heade, Gallace discovers acute psychological and spiritual potential, as well as frank beauty, in seemingly unremarkable coastal scenes; she also shares their rapt interest in light and color. And like transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson—who greatly inspired the Luminists—she studies nature intently, opens herself to it, learns from it and channels it into her art.

The ocean is much more than a site in these paintings; it is a presiding and defining force that elicits reverence and awe, wonderment and trepidation. In *Storm* (2014), with slate gray water and a gray, cloudy sky, the ocean seems to be accruing wild force. In *Beach/Wave* (2013), a small, frothy wave about to strike the beach is ragged and chaotic, yet also sensuous and effervescent. In Gallace's hands, this ephemeral, utterly routine ocean moment becomes enduring and enthralling.