

Terry Rose  
**Portals**

Out of silent subtle mystery emerge images.  
These images coalesce into forms.  
Within each form is contained the seed  
and essence of life.  
Thus do all things emerge and expand out  
of darkness and emptiness.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

In Terry Rose's paintings, everything is becoming. Nothing is fixed, everything changes, elides, bleeds, bursts, cascades, slides, radiates, emerges, expands. His imagery reflects, and participates in, our world and our being in flux.

Look at a drop of pond water through a microscope and discover a place where everything shifts. The flagellates swim, the cells divide, the bacteria absorb each other. Consider, on a much larger scale, our universe. Stars are born and die. Objects explode, or hurtle through space at unimaginable speeds. Galaxies collide, intermingle, and change form. Nothing is as it was a mere moment ago, nor will it ever be the same again – in the pond, or in the cosmos. Rose's paintings, which point simultaneously to phenomena of the miniscule and the vast, are a visual poetics of this truth. They show us the primary condition of physics, life, and the human experience and reassure us that it is right and beautiful.

The artist walks a fine line between abstraction and representation. On the one hand, his paintings are careful arrangements of shapes and colors, and subtle manipulations of

perceived space. But on the other, the ambiguous shapes suggest a host of things that we know well: cells and suns, clouds and spores. And the spaces in which these forms exist are likewise suggestive - of environments, atmospheres, or dark voids. But the fugitive identities of the shapes and spaces, along with their tendency to morph, set up an uncertainty about their very state of being. Do we see solids, liquids, or gases – or pure energy – or pure paint?

Paint is an apt medium for creating images like these – a liquid that turns solid. Rose, though, depends more than most painters on the fluid nature of his medium. To create his floating worlds, he coats his surfaces with wet varnish, and then drips into the varnish oils, inks, micron pigments (solutions that contain suspended particulate matter), and enamels. These substances move across and through the varnish, and their chemical and physical reactions yield the blossoming, growing, and gestating forms that characterize his work. Rose experiments tirelessly with materials and their chance interactions.

Sometimes the experiments fail, but when they succeed, the results are remarkable. He adopted this loose dialogue with matter to distance practiced technique from his process in order to discover new types of imagery. He seeks and preserves the happy accidents that allow chaos to participate with order, in a gentleman's agreement with chance.

Rose's practice is entirely contemporary. His paintings are part of a larger discourse amongst twenty-first-century artists that seeks to explore, simultaneously, the phenomena of the microcosm and the macrocosm, the organic and the inorganic, perception and the imagination, and the ultimate interconnectedness of all things. With this generation of

painters, he transcends both the formalism of Modernism and the irony of Post-modernism to create works of formidable visual eloquence that have something profound to say about the world, our organs of perception, our minds, and our propensity to create aesthetic and intellectual information. Rose's paintings are like lenses that slide in magnification and focus to reveal, at once, the structures and wonders of the very largest and very smallest things that we can comprehend. Spiritually, they remind us that our desperate desire for attachment is fundamentally misguided, for everything must and will change.

This rejection of notions of fixity is prevalent in Eastern philosophies, and thus permeates the arts of East Asia, which deeply inform Rose's work as art historical antecedent and wellspring of inspiration. The artist is particularly drawn to aspects of Chinese painting that efface distinctions between representation and stylization, and that consider pictorial space in a dynamic relationship with figures and objects. His work is also informed by the loose liquidity of water-based media and the vertical compositional formats of scrolls and screens.

From the perspective of Western art history, Rose is certainly an inheritor of the great tradition of twentieth-century biomorphic abstract painting that traces its way back through Richter, Bleckner, Pollock, Miró, and Kandinsky. His process is most closely akin to Pollock's controlled chance, with its roots in Surrealist automatic drawing and the random procedures of Dada. He is also a great atmospheric colorist, like Ruysdael, Turner, and Whistler, in whose works skies become active sublime beings.

*Portals* is an apt title, not only for Rose's current body of work, but for most of his paintings over the last decade. A portal is, of course, a door, or a window – or a lens – a liminal aperture into another place. The poetic trope of the portal has been used time and time again to help describe the indescribable: the gateless gate of Japanese Zen, St. Paul's glass (through which we see darkly), and William Blake's "doors of perception." If Blake's doors "...were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite." Rose's paintings do not attempt to describe this visionary experience, they show it.

Again, in Terry Rose's work, everything is becoming in another sense of the word, in the sense of visual satisfaction and overt beauty. Like philosophy, like poetry, the paintings reward prolonged and repeated experience and contemplation. Here, beauty is not an end in itself, but a portal to the ineffable.

All created things are transitory; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.

The Buddha, *The Dhammapada*

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