



Out of Place

June 2020
Danielle Foster

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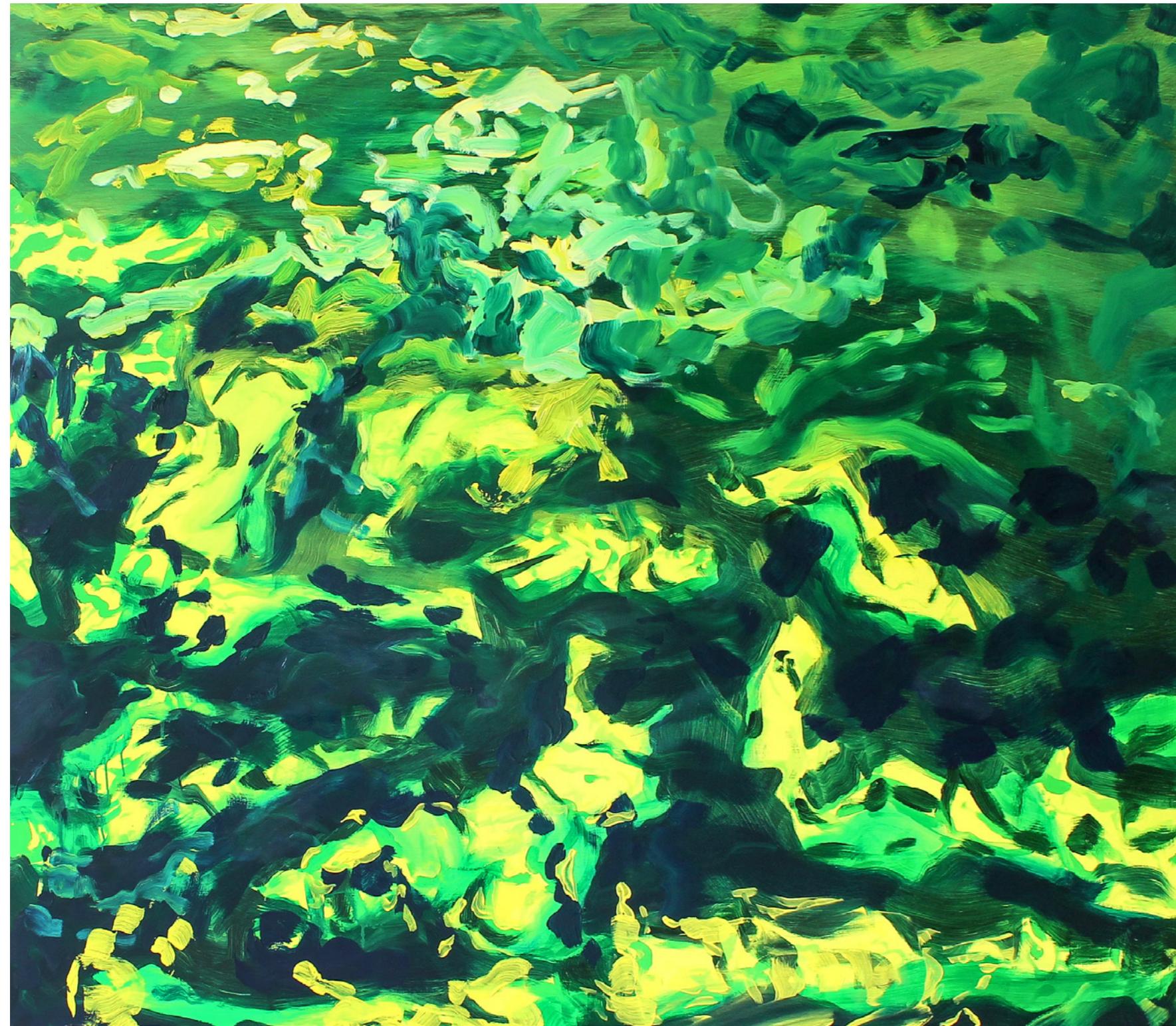
This practice is widely concerned with painting figures in relation to their environments and to those around them. Along with the physical appearance of these subjects, a psychological state is also suggested. The scenes I focus on involve people exposed in moments of vulnerability or discordance with their immediate surroundings. Source imagery is chosen from social media, news and movies. In the images, inebriated bodies smash through windowpanes and slump into tall grass, drawing attention to what could be described as dysfunctional, anti-social, or out of the ordinary behaviours.

Rather than illustrating the bodies and spaces directly however, oil paint is utilised for its potential to shift and slip. The way the paint is applied aims to create an atmosphere of toxicity and instability. The young adults are not just acting upon or within the architecture, landscape or crowd, and the environments are not acting independently upon them, they are collapsing into one another in the fluid application of paint.

FIG.1
Overgrown
2019-20
oil on board



FIG.2
Protest
2019-20
oil on board



The collapsing is suggested by disrupting formal conventions of figure and ground relationships, colour relationships, and perspectival space. In *Protest* (see fig. 2), for example, there is no horizon line and no modelling of objects or people. Furthermore, it has a vibrant lemon yellow ground which is the brightest tone in the painting. This creates the potential for the foreground to appear in front of subsequent layers. However, the array of green hues loosely and thickly track across the yellow surface. The texture of these layers brings them physically forward in space. There is a playful tension, then, between the layers as they push, pull and hover between each other. These gestures at times pull together and suggest figures, but soon slip back into a jumble of painterly marks.

Two of the artist's works I thought about a lot throughout the making the *Out of Place* series were Alice Neel and Maria Lassnig. Their figurative paintings are engaging to me in the way they emphasise the painful, splintered, strange and awkward aspects of existence rather than pursuing a perfect likeness. Alice Neel began her practice as an artist in the 1920s. In some ways she had a conventional approach towards her subjects where a

person's body is observed and interpreted. However, within this tradition of figuration, she brought a unique perspective, one which has been described as honesty and directness in her depictions. She painted women's naked bodies, not idealised but specific, not objectifying but vulnerable, not demeaning but confident.

I can see this honesty in Neel's painting *Pregnant Woman* (1971). This is a woman's specific-body but it is also a pregnant body performing what pregnant bodies do, growing human life. This is something that brings all humanity into commonality as Helen Molesworth points out.¹ The viewer is pulled from the intensely individual and personal into a socio-political one not just because of the subject of the female body and pregnancy, but also because of the painterly treatment Neel has applied to the woman. There are imperfections in the skin she describes, the body appears heavy and strained in areas, and there is a matter of fact expression directed out at us.

1. Helen Molesworth, "Walkthrough of *Alice Neel: Freedom* led by Helen Molesworth", Youtube Video, 51:26, April 16, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aULGfEQZPUA>



FIG.3
Untitled 2
(Stranger series)
2019
acrylic ink
on paper



FIG.4
Untitled 5
(Stranger series)
2019
acrylic ink
on paper

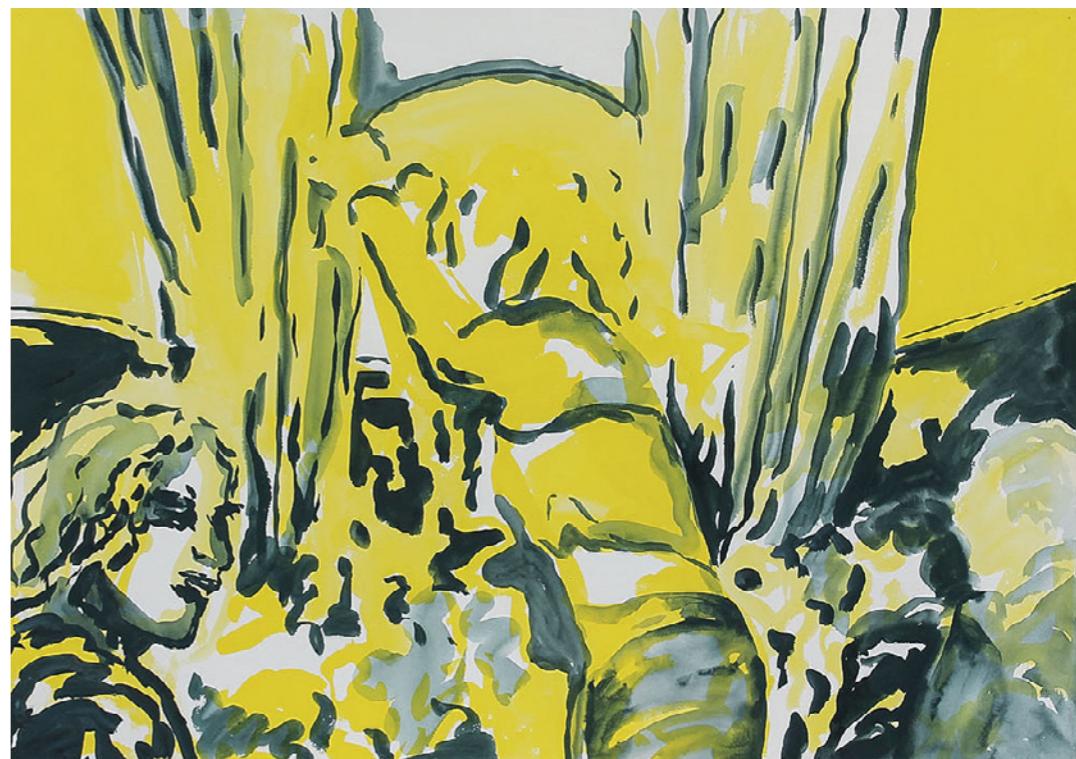


FIG.5
Untitled 7
(Stranger series)
2019
acrylic ink
on paper

FIG.6
Untitled 6
(Stranger series)
2019
acrylic ink
on paper



FIG.7
Night Feelings
2019–20
oil on board

Maria Lassnig began her career in the 1950s, she flipped the conventions of representation or more accurately turned them inside-out with her “body-awareness” paintings. While Alice Neel’s painted bodies show off their corporeality, projecting personhood, complex emotion and psychology, Maria Lassnig’s ‘body-awareness’ paintings begin from the inside of the body: her body to be exact. They seem to work their way outwards from this position with subjective observations of her own physical sensations. If she couldn’t sense certain parts of her body like her ears or her hair, then she would leave them out.²

This approach left the bodies fragmented, incomplete in appearance. This is evident in Lassnig’s painting, *Two Ways of being (Double Self-Portrait)* (2000). There are two versions of a self-portrait, one seemingly painted observing how her internal body felt and the other, approaching the body more traditionally from the outside. Rather than a direct recording of her features, this work seems to be a lot more exposing and vulnerable. There is a connection with the body in the

process and at the same time the figure appears distant psychologically from itself.

Even in the more abstracted depiction of herself where she is using her bodyawareness technique, the fleshy fragments are quite close to the way pale skin appears with all its yellows, reds, pinks, purples and blues. It is not unlike the way Neel approaches skin. This suggests there is an element of external perception at play here as well. The feeling of the body cannot be completely removed from its surroundings, and we cannot help being influenced by what we have seen. I would argue that Lassnig’s work not only works from the perspective of the inside out but that the sensations and knowledge of the appearance of the exterior feedback into the interior.

The properties of paint, various mediums and tools provide a vast array of effects. The more fluid the paint is, for example, the more room is left for unforeseen events to occur such as dripping, colours mixing on the surface, and forms disintegrating. I am not aiming for a direct reflection of my psyche, as in Expressionism, but these works are also not predetermined. I can decide whether to leave that mark, wipe it off or paint over it. There are micro-decisions in combination with unforeseeable outcomes.



2. Maria Lassnig, “Inside Out”, interview by Jörg Heiser, *Frieze*, November 2, 2006, <https://frieze.com/article/inside-out>.

Identity, feelings and experiences are abstract and changeable concepts, they are fluid, slippery and hard to pin down. This series searches for how the material qualities of paint could be utilised to create unique signs pointing out concepts of slippery identity. Rather than trying to make the concepts more solid and fixed, I have increasingly embraced their shifting, unstable qualities and brought them into the physical process of painting.

Neel's figures appear in their bodies, mine are more integrally part of their environments.³ The figures in my work are less bodily than Neels and Lassnig's and are dissociated further from subject-hood with their lurid colour. They suggest dimension at times but often fall into transparent thin intimations. This further distancing from reality seems in line with a new kind of reality which humanity is experiencing as new modes of technology intertwine with our daily lives.

3. Helen Molesworth, "Walkthrough of Alice Neel: Freedom led by Helen Molesworth".

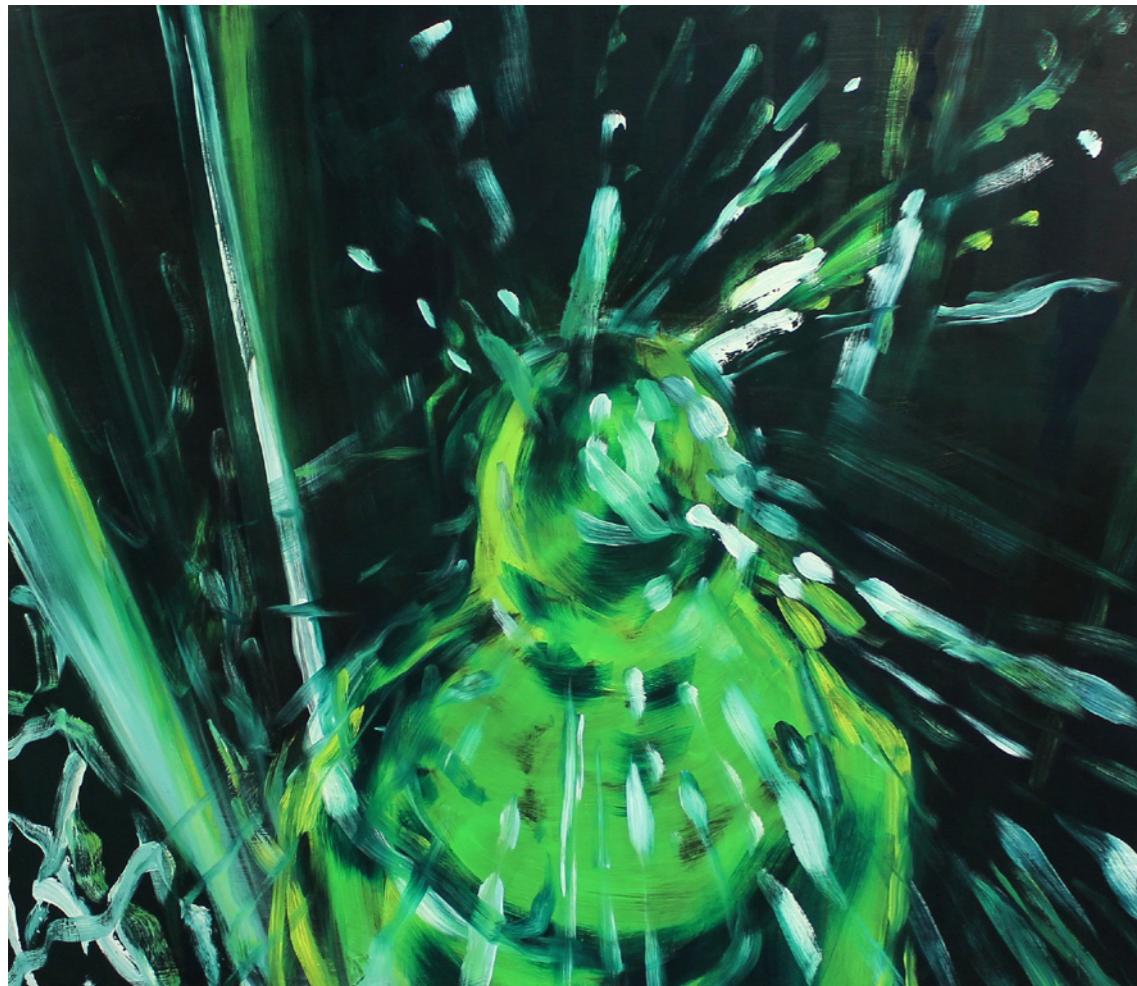


FIG.8
Waterlogged
2019-20
oil on board

FIG.9
Outsider
2019-20
oil on board

FRONT COVER:
FIG.10 [FRONT COVER]
Protest (detail)
2019-20
oil on board