

S t e p h e n M c C l y m o n t



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"Reading Stephen McClymont"
by Deborah J. Haynes

How do we *read* abstraction? More to the point, how do we interpret images that are born of experience in the phenomenal and elemental world, but whose form does not readily reveal those mysteries?

Start with the surface. Color seems to transcend or replace narrative. The subject is indigo, with azure, emerald, vermilion, crimson, ochre, black. This colorful brilliance *becomes* a narrative about space and time. Texture is scraped and stroked. The method, obviously intuitive. The surface shimmers, breaks, catches light. Then, associations and metaphors as a world appears. Everywhere is the great blue and we are submerged. The paintings, taken as a whole, offer a phenomenology of water.

Stephen McClymont's paintings are simultaneously epic and intimate, heroic and personal. His work strives for the universal and does not seek to express the particularities of personal or cultural identity. These are paintings of experience that transcend such categories. We feel the pull toward nature, yet we are afraid of it. We climb mountains. We, like McClymont, swim in the sea. But unlike the painter, we do not usually give form to that luminous and mysterious world.

For nineteenth-century painters from Frederick Church to Théodore Géricault, water served as an "in-between" in the elements in the landscape: in between the earth and the sky. In McClymont's paintings, water is the medium. Our invisible bodies are allied with water, part of the water, and filled with water. In creating a space that seeks to express this contact with the elemental forces of nature, we are reminded that the universe is simultaneously matter and spirit. Merging with this boundless vastness, we know that we are nothing. We are like specks of marble dust that coat the sea floor off the Greek island of Paros, where old quarries no longer produce stone.

In reading these paintings, the contemplative sublime is given form. We observe and reflect as we, too, swim in this sea of space and time. Water is an alchemical agent, its constantly changing character instructing us to be fluid and receptive to the flow of things. The past with its shipwrecks and glorious achievements is as distant, really, as the future with its technoseductive promises. Here, now, only fluidity, only space. Only time to muse, and to be.

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