

SIXTY INCHES FROM CENTER

Earthly Pleasures: A Review of Soumya Netrabile's *Searching for Stars*

by Annie Dauber

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The artist's paintings are somatic and experiential; an uninhibited portrayal of how it feels to be in nature.

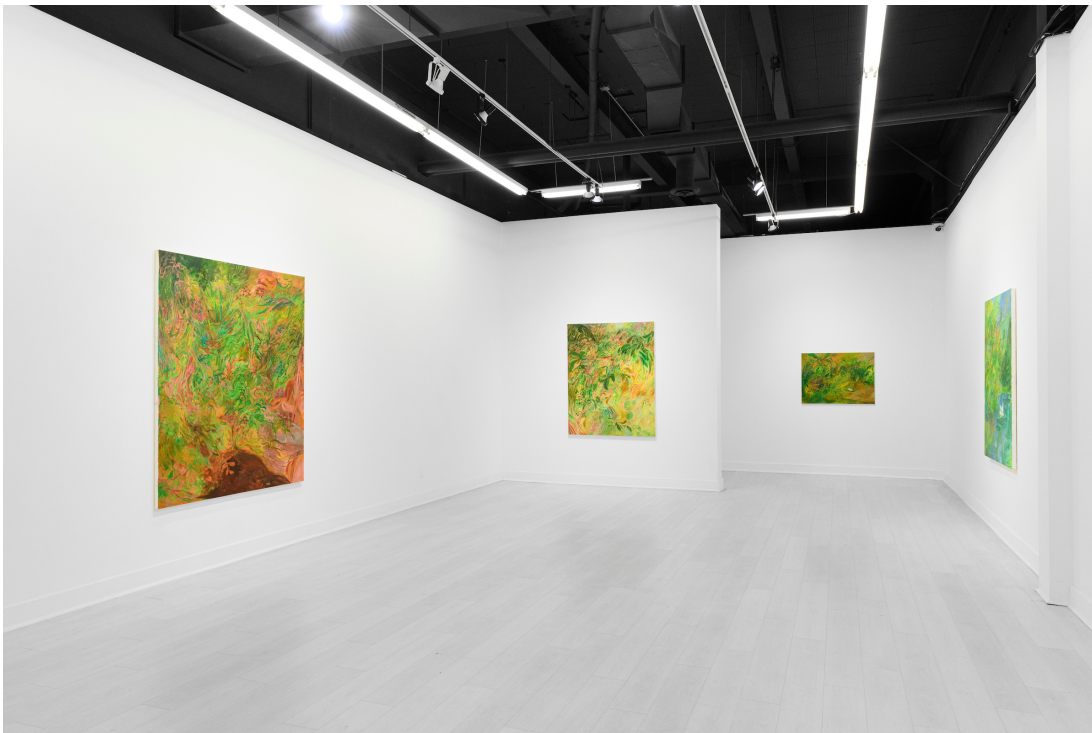


Image: Installation View, *Searching for Stars*, 2022, pt.2 Gallery, Oakland, CA. White-walled gallery space with three of Netrabile's abstracted nature scenes on the wall. Courtesy of Soumya Netrabile and pt.2 Gallery.



Image: Soumya Netrabile, *Searching for Stars*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 72 × 60 inches. An abstracted painting of green and salmon-colored vegetation. Courtesy of Soumya Netrabile and pt.2 Gallery.

Soumya Netrabile's current exhibition *Searching for Stars* at pt. 2 Gallery is an explosion of color and form. Her bold and bright landscapes are an enticing visual feast; each one is an honest, intuitive, and uninhibited portrayal of how it feels to be in nature. Netrabile's work epitomizes the somatic sensuality of flora and fauna.

As Netrabile describes it, "*Searching for Stars* is about reaching for remote points of illumination throughout the journey of making a painting." She recalls, "The words are taken from a line in an unfinished poem I wrote a while ago: A roving eye / not so steady or certain / searching for stars." In viewing Netrabile's canvases, it feels as though we are forced to have this roving eye, to journey through the work. The motion of each work takes you in like a riptide, impossible to break away once you begin to follow the urgency of the brushstroke, the flow of Netrabile's hand.

Netrabile spends her days split between the studio and nature walks in the woods along the Des Plaines River. On these walks, she devotes herself to macro and micro observations of the world around her. Netrabile further reflects on these walks:

"I try to spend time in the woods every day, no matter the weather. While in the space, I take in as much as I can — the light feel of the air on my skin, colors, textures, smells. I carry a little notebook and write down or draw quick impressions... This mindful engagement has become a part of how the paintings come into being. When I am painting, I situate my mind back to the woods. My engagement with nature and with this particular local place seems to be working as a catalyst to release my imagination and memories."

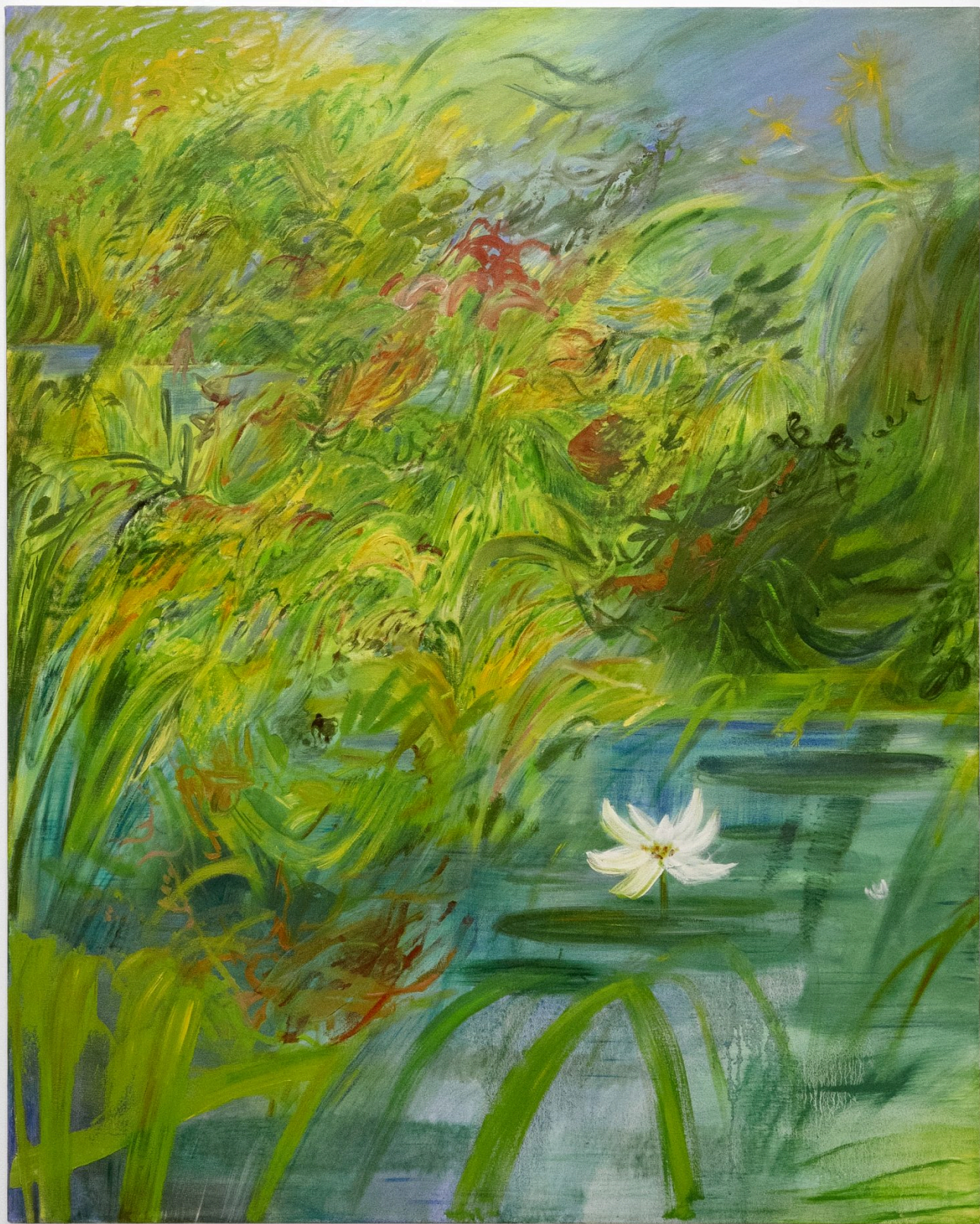


Image: Soumya Netrabile, *The Pools*, 2022. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Gestural lines of green grass frame an abstract pond and lily pad with a flower. Courtesy of Soumya Netrabile and pt.2 Gallery.

This is the quintessential feeling you get when you observe these paintings: a sense of groundedness and reality merging with the ethereality of a memory. The winding river in *The Pools* takes you on a dream-like journey. The foreground of the scene feels representational of a specific location, but it is suffused with the haziness of a more introspective memory state in the periphery of the painting. In *The Sparrow*, the ground is swept up into a wall of flora as the scene starts to pulsate. Softer textures are met by defined leaf-like shapes and sharply applied dots, greens and oranges flow into terra cotta tones, and the eye falls on a fallen bird with blood red beneath its head.



Image: Soumya Netrabile, *The Sparrow*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 30 × 40 inches. Layers of vegetation engulf a dead bird. Courtesy of Soumya Netrabile and pt.2 Gallery.

In reality or in Netrabile's painted world — it is not all edenic: there are bones and body parts; there are worms wriggling under rocks. But even so, these paintings are marked with an absence of fear. They are infused instead with reverence, a lack of judgment, and an openness to the power and magnitude of the natural world.

These paintings communicate the somatic and emotional phenomena of immersion in nature. The goal is accuracy not in visual representation — it doesn't matter if her organic forms deviate from the exact curve of a leaf — but rather it is an honesty of experience. Each work maps an embodied understanding of the woods: nature in full swing.

Netrabile plays with light in innovative ways; she eschews the traditional method of equating light with value by relying, instead, on potent color choices. *The Red Field*, for Netrabile, is a quintessential night painting as its deep red contrasts with punchy greens and pinks of day. It captures the feeling of night, the emotion, and the physicality of when your vision is washed in a single hue. There is an underlying sense of darkness without the instruction that you are looking at the night. *The Red Field* is suffused with secrecy, with motion under the blanket of a red de facto darkness.

There is something profoundly dynamic about her renderings: constant addition and subtraction create a layered surface as shapes and colors are scraped away and pushed around. Some of her pigments come straight from the tube: she squeezes it with one hand and pushes paint onto canvas with the other. She paints with urgency, applying pigment with an infectious liveliness that tempts your eye and startles your mind when you come face to face with the canvas.

All in all, the artist speaks to the heart of the work best:



Image: Soumya Netrabile, *The Red Field*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 48 × 60 inches. A red canvas with hints of leaves and vegetation emerges from the canvas. Courtesy of Soumya Netrabile and pt.2 Gallery.

“Painting is about opening the gates and letting things out. For me, it has always been about purging.”

Soumya Netrabile's solo exhibition *Searching for the Stars* was on view at pt. 2 Gallery from November 12 – December 16, 2022.
