

# art and cake

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[Skip to content](#)

- [Submissions](#)
- [Shoebox PR](#)
- [Shoebox Projects](#)
- [L.A. Artist Resources](#)
- 

JUNE 3, 2019 BY GENIE DAVIS

## Artist Profile: Rebecca Hamm



Rebecca Hamm;

Image courtesy of the artist

## Rebecca Hamm: Nature Reclaims Art

### **Written by Genie Davis**

Rebecca Hamm says that her paintings reveal the moments where nature's striking beauty alters human transformation. Her layered, abstracted images are sparked with the promise of this unpredictable, awe-inspiring, and mysterious force, of nature itself: besting us, changing us, revealing its depths, wonder, and experiences.

Experiential in nature, each of Hamm's series focuses on something profound that the artist has participated in. With her recent series *Water Rites*, the experiences she depicts come from moments spent in and with water.

"The first painting of this series, while celebrating glistening light and ever-changing color, is about that mysteriously blissful moment of floating suspended in a pool, feeling free yet also a breath away from disaster. The series continues with this genre of life moments," Hamm says, noting that water is both essential and ever-present in human life, sustaining it and as a part of the process of giving birth. She says that there are a wide variety of water rituals in human cultures, and that the cleansing experience they offer touch upon themes of life, death, and renewal. "The paintings in *Water Rites* present images from commonly shared experience with references to both life-sustaining and life-threatening moments, opening a space of exploration."



Rebecca Hamm, Untitled 11, Water Rites series; Image courtesy of the artist

Hamm's latest body of work is *TreeSpeak Series 1*, a project she began earlier this year. "These paintings experiment with excessive layering of watercolor paint and generous use of black pigments. The images are of ungrounded, mature trees which evoke a sense of being brought upward among them, alone in nature." According to Hamm "The most recent paintings which are more abstracted, still push the medium. I slide between these two margins of the referential and abstract, hoping to retain solid foundations of color, shape and light. I enjoy that the references naturally hold symbolic qualities."

Her work is highly evocative, and feels intense and visceral. Hamm says "The energy of a painting holds so much from the making of

it...I love to make paintings, not as a sentimental or emotional action, but a true loving practice, a deep giving-over of self, willing to challenge comfort levels and go into unknown territory.”

In short, it is hardly surprising that there is a strong spiritual element to Hamm’s work. “Each painting, if I am paying attention, offers more about this amazing path and clarifies that this road is only just beginning. Painting, for me, is an active meditation and also a challenging pilgrimage.” She adds that her work is “somewhat of a sacred experience in that it goes beyond me, while it also employs my particular sense of compositional balance, personal energy, and preferences.” She explains that as she works, she experience fully emotive, involving moments that are “similar to those that I have had in singing performances, when I would be lifted to another plane.”

An intensity comes into her work to keep building the composition of the painting, as she seeks to create moments of impact and balance through color and gesture. “The work seems to catch its own life, and I try to keep up with it. I am genuinely surprised by where the work goes.”

Hamm describes her process as beginning with the “inspiration of nature” but evolving into “something of a mash-up between the experiential and the inner spirit. I find everything in the natural world holds, among other things, its own true hero’s story of overcoming challenge, surviving desperate passages and involvement in extraordinary transformations.”



Rebecca Hamm; Image courtesy of the artist

The color, light, and life all embedded so richly in Hamm's work is inspired by her own experiences of nature. "I am awed, humbled, reflective in natural settings... Nature, as does art, waits for you to engage, then reveals layer after layer — the micro in the macro, showing specific and infinite at the same time. Life is light, spirit, constant movement, vibrancy of color and texture. As a young person, I remember learning about light waves and molecules of atmosphere. I loved thinking my eye was actually somehow touching what I saw."

Drawing from her own experiences in nature, she will often be stopped by a view that exhibits transformative properties, areas of "resurgent growth" where a natural repair against human incursion is taking place. "Time stops and the image imprints in an instant. The information in those moments feels infinite and overwhelming yet comforting. Perhaps I paint because this experience of seeing and feeling is beyond words."

The process starts with making photographs of these places, then bringing them to the studio to review, merge and crop until she finds what she describes as a fitting composition. "I don't bring pictures back with me to seek a replay of the image, but instead, an honoring of the experience. As an answer to the original

inspiration, the painting process begins from the photo which itself is a construct of light and pigment, and I'm sure, informs the color choices for the painting. After beginning the basic composition, I then put the photo reference aside and find the true jumping off point."

Whether using oil, acrylic, water color Conte crayon, or graphite, Hamm says her approach is similar, and grows from her passion for the quality of pigment and flow. "I often find myself exploring color interactions and working through value compositions in my thoughts," she attests. "This past decade I have leaned toward the simplicity of watercolor and its gentleness on the environment. I enjoy using one palette and one to three brushes for all the works, regardless of dimension." That said, she is still drawn to the richness of oils, and is starting new oil paintings for an upcoming show.

She loves layering paper panels, as well as hydrating and stretching large, rich paper for her work. "What a wonderful experience to feel the dry paper, much larger than my height, as it soaks up the water and becomes a soft suede-like texture, almost like clay in my hands; and then it returns to a wonderfully crisp surface, perfect for receiving watercolor."

The elements of a tree – paper, meet the elements of water – with watercolor paint. It is the perfect merging, like Hamm's work itself, of the experiential and the natural, with the human; and that interaction becomes transcendent in the artist's hands.





















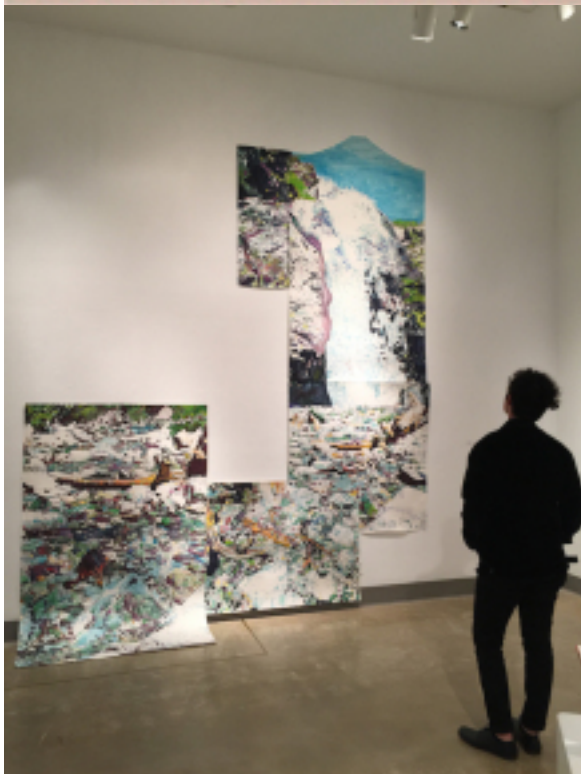
















Rebecca Hamm