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Sharon Ellis, *Samhain*, 2010, alkyd on canvas, 30 x 26 inches

## Sharon Ellis: Paintings

Los Angeles-based Sharon Ellis produces hallucinatory landscapes of impressive vibrancy and complexity. Using a rich and varied palette, she delves deep into the essence of nature, imbuing it with sensational powers. She finds her scenes near her home in Southern California and while her paintings could be described as Californian, they really portray an imaginary world, where clouds, grass, sunlight and stars seem more from the Land of Oz than from our own. Clearly in love with paint, she layers each canvas many times over, obtaining an unusual tactility. This tactility reinforces the energy that emanates from all her works.

On first look, her paintings might seem pretty rather than profound—for instance, “Reminiscence,” in which rays of light stream from a cloud-filled blue sky onto a glowing, green field, where daisies grow. But the leafless tree that frames the scene, with its tangle of spidery branches, casts an ominous spell, and eventually, one feels that something is wrong and that anticipating a simple, sunny, optimistic picture was naïve. No one would for a moment have the same expectations with the resonant “Samhain.” Under a deep yellow and red sky, with a malicious face emerging from the clouds, a figure appears to be sitting in the midst of a haunted bower. Dead, black branches frame these strange creatures, leaving us only wanting to see more and know more, even though we shudder at the implications. That’s not to say that many of her paintings aren’t also gorgeous, like “Gardenia Dream,” with its glittery stars in a bright blue night. Here you see her debt to Van Gogh, who also had strange and wonderful dreams. VALERIE GLADSTONE

*Through Feb. 19, Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, 730 5th Ave., 212-445-0444*

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