

# VAN DOREN WAXTER

## The CHESTERTOWN *spy*

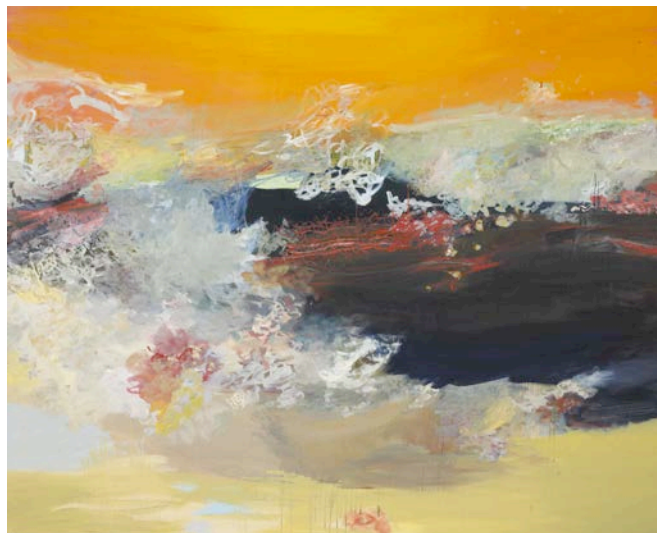
### **Eva Lundsager – Elsewhere at the Academy Art Museum**

December 16, 2013 by Mary McCoy

There's a story to be imagined in each of Eva Lundsager's paintings on view at the Academy Art Museum through January 26. Half good-humored fantasy, half anxious apocalyptic visions, her paintings and monoprints are ecstatic eruptions of color and activity that hover between landscape and abstraction.

Given her explosive exuberance, it comes as a surprise to learn that Lundsager was a student of Anne Truitt's at the University of Maryland in the 1980's. In an intriguing juxtaposition, the Museum is presenting a small show of Truitt's work in the atrium gallery just outside Lundsager's exhibit. Truitt, who came to prominence in the 1960's, is well known for her quiet, precise, introspective work. Lundsager seems, at least on the surface, to be her exact opposite.

A Maryland native now living in Boston, Lundsager paints with an impulsive playfulness akin to Klee, Miro and Matisse. Like her predecessors, she creates a slightly awkward beauty that's so direct and honest it can't help but draw you in. But Lundsager also delights in playing with the effects of paint.



"As the air of", oil on linen, 72 x 90 inches, 2010

Unlike Truitt, whose fields of color rarely show a brush stroke, Lundsager takes advantage of everything paint can do. She brushes on swaths of color and stains, drips and doodles layers of paint on top of paint. She constantly plays with transparency and opacity, light and dark, somber hues and gaudy, even noxious colors. The velvety black of Sumi ink blooms with royal blue, red or deep avocado green. Multiple pastel scribbles bubble in the air above near-black fields of paint. Whether working with watercolor and Sumi ink, monoprints or oil on linen, her painting style is loose-knit and experimental. It all feels speculative, glimpsed in the midst of change.

There's a sense of discovery in each image, not to mention a sense of humor. Spidery drips flow upward as if laughing at gravity and horizon lines float in mid-air. In her series of untitled Sumi ink and watercolor paintings, elegant strokes and trickles of sooty Sumi ink are dotted with tiny clusters of alizarin crimson or phthalo green turning them cartoonish. But far from being candy-coated visions, these paintings and monoprints have darker, more troubling undercurrents.



“ The Surrender,” oil on linen, 54 x 66 inches, 2013

“The Surrender,” a large oil painting very loosely based on Velázquez’s “The Surrender of Breda,” is overloaded with weather. Successive layers of lichen green, gray and purple gray drip like tears or sheets of rain. They emerge from billowing webs and tangles of squiggled paint that call to mind sponges, clumps of frog’s eggs, scattered brains or sketchy diagrams molecules. With passages of pink, brown, grapefruit, mango and beige, Lundsager’s colors are audacious but strangely nuanced, conferring remarkable subtleties that Truitt would have approved of. Simultaneously enticing and ominous, there’s no solid ground here, only turmoil and frantic movement, possibly a

cataclysmic moment. Simultaneously enticing and ominous, there's no solid ground here, only turmoil and frantic movement, possibly a cataclysmic moment.

The amazing thing is that Lundsager is so perfectly comfortable with taking these offhand drips, dots and doodles seriously, and here is where Anne Truitt's influence really comes into play.

A native of Easton, transplanted to Washington, Truitt earnestly believed in the value of art as a discipline for understanding meaning. In her celebrated journal, *Daybook*, she wrote, "It interested me that inert material could be turned to the service of meaning. It still is a miracle to me that a pencil line, ipso facto a material mark, can have integral meaning."

It's a miracle that thoroughly fascinates Lundsager. However simple or complex her brushstrokes and drizzles of paint may be, she allows them to be exactly what they are. Contrasting colors sing out against one another or muddy when they run together. Webs of heavy paint threaten to suffocate, while airy washes disintegrate into white space. Never specific but inescapably palpable, thoughts and emotions rise and fall as you look, and you can almost imagine her brush dancing like a princess in a fairy tale or spinning in obsessive scribbles like a mad old witch. True to any fairy tale, Lundsager's topsy-turvy worlds are not all light and happiness, but they hold a similar wisdom—it's the darkness as well as the light that causes us to learn and grow.