

Art in America

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JULIAN HATTON ELIZABETH HARRIS

This show of recent painting saw Julian Hatton branching out. After mastering the 24-inch-square format common to his previous work, Hatton seems to have gotten restless, and few of the works (all 2010) in the current exhibition, his seventh at Elizabeth Harris, were of that format or size. Some were painted on 16-by-24-inch rectangles as though cut down from his signature format, but many of the 15 paintings are larger, with dimensions ranging up to 6 feet wide. In general, the works seem less slowly built up and ruminated over than previously, although the surfaces are still complexly layered, brushed and glazed.

As before, Hatton uses landscape as a jumping-off point. His shapes are roughly and expressively adapted from trees, roads, hills and rivers. Yet the new work finds the New York-based artist moving quite dramatically in the direction of pure abstraction. In *Wide Open*, Hatton seems to surrender some of his characteristic control, leaving parts of the canvas showing. A large peacock-blue field is hard-edged on one side and roughly feathered on the other, while loose graffiti-like scratches mark its center. The most abstract compositions in the show—such as the outstanding *Reflections* and *Incidental*—are pleasingly provisional and, compared with the closed forms and constricted spaces of his earlier pieces, seem to let in some welcome fresh air.

Hatton continues to prove himself a master of electric color harmonies. *Persimmons Or Not* features Matissean cutout mountain forms in salmon that stretch across the middle register, underlined by a milky blue river shape that is suspended over the white ground. The

Julian Hatton: *Wide Open*, 2010,
oil on canvas, 36 by 48 inches;
at Elizabeth Harris.



large canvas *High Winds On Ouleout Creek*, a standout in misty pink and turquoise, suggests a scene of frosty tree buds from a kitchen window. Other works, too, can be read as outdoor views seen from inside, with *repoussoir* elements that screen the foreground, as in Jane Freilicher's Long Island landscapes where interior and exterior merge.

A sensitive painter with an impressive body of work to his credit, Hatton has made a significant advancement with this show. Admirably discontent with his past achievement, he is questioning and striving to extend his reach.

—Jeff Frederick