

Nina Kluth

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Casual swipes of thickly applied paint, bright splotches, and spreading patches of color that occasionally allow a glimpse of bare canvas: Nina Kluth develops her paintings with a tempestuousness and roughness

that is, in the end, carefully calibrated. Her virtuoso *alla prima* paintings often look nearly abstract on first glance, but invariably also resolve into naturalism. Although Kluth's work is explicitly anchored in the depiction of landscape, this representational content is balanced by the emphasis she places on the role of color, the materiality of the paint, and her rich, surprising compositional choices. She is aided in this by her choice of subject: Kluth draws her motifs from the ubiquitous forms of urban vegetation, the typically scraggly "urban nature" typified by weeds hemmed in by walls and facades and forced into new forms—branches sticking out



like spears, strangely contorted bushes, underbrush struggling for a ray of sunlight, sometimes towering up between buildings, sometimes dwarfed by their shade. Parks and allotment gardens with their inherent artificiality are well suited to join this panoply of motifs, an urban vegetable underclass that, left to its own devices, succeeds in populating the undefined interstices and margins throughout a city's fabric.

Kluth extrapolates these expansive yet disintegrating moments of vegetative order into a kind of latent abstraction and develops them into something new. References to particular objects are used, she says, merely to provide "easy points of access for a way of seeing that is then continued in the abstract." This is particularly true of her most recent works, seen in her solo show "*Zwillingskristall*" (Twin Crystal). In these paintings, representation arises only to crumble, giving way to the painterly as an independent force. Whereas her earlier pictures were often dominated by colorful linear gestures—the pictorial space defined by minimal points of reference such as elements of a facade, the line of a horizon, or bits of perspectival distance glimpsed through gaps—these new paintings increasingly resolve into abstract patterns, conjuring an almost amorphous sense of hue and space through color

Nina Kluth, *Gartenanlage Ibsenstrasse* (Ibsenstrasse Gardens), 2009, acrylic and canvas, 43 1/4 x 43

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choices and compositional layerings. One sees depth, one sees the space of the landscape itself, but otherwise the image has de facto dissolved to the point of utter abstraction. Often the only clue to the ostensible subject matter comes via the titles, such as *Isla und blaue Blätter* (Purple and Blue Leaves), 2009; *Grüne, gelbe und braune Blätter* (Green, Yellow, and Brown Leaves), 2008; or, even more vaguely, *Viele Blätter* (Many Leaves), 2009. Other titles such as *Gartenanlage Ibsenstrasse* (Ibsenstrasse Gardens), 2009, or *U-Schöneberg in Blau und Rot* (Schöneberg Subway Station in Blue and Red), 2009, assert in no uncertain terms that the paintings have real-life points of reference—and in fact even Kluth's most abstract pictures originate in quite specific observations. *Gartenanlage Ibsenstrasse* in particular features an image that virtually disintegrates into a concentrically tapering nexus of milky green, light blue, beige, and pink, with only a bit of gray and blue possibly suggesting a sky. Nearly free of concrete spatial coordinates, the painting presents nature as a sweeping, nebulous space of light and color.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.