

An abstract painting featuring a dense composition of vibrant colors including yellow, green, blue, and pink, interspersed with dark, expressive black brushstrokes. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complex texture.

**ROBIN FELD**

Cover: *Room of Light (crop)*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36"

Robin Feld

*Energized*

May 25 - June 19, 2021

Essay by James Pustorino

**THE PAINTING CENTER**

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10001  
Tues-Sat, 11-6 pm, 212-343-1060, [www.thepaintingcenter.org](http://www.thepaintingcenter.org)

## Robin Feld at The Painting Center

For New Yorkers like Robin Feld, the experience of nature is a mixture of many influences. Even deep within a wooded urban park, there are the lights of the city, roads, and airports all thrown into and reflected in the sky, the noise of far-off traffic and planes overhead, the remnants of industrial structures and power lines, the transition of park to pavement, of trees to street—the constant calling back of busyness that fills our active lives.

Feld often spends time making studies in such places, and the paintings that eventually develop reflect this focused, but infinite variety of visual experience. How we see, feel, perceive—these are the things that make up what we think of as existing or living in a moment of time—a gathering of the effects of the outside world and how we pass through it.

Feld lives in Brooklyn near Prospect Park. She has regularly gone into the park to make watercolors and take photographs for years and has sat for hours recording her impressions, resulting in decades' worth of images. When she approaches a canvas, however, these are generally put aside and there is a new encounter of paint that must be worked through. Painting also has an experience—a struggle and a now-time that engages Feld as completely as the life around her does.

The result of these engagements is a painting that carries the sense of both potentialities: that of the moment we are in and that of the painting's own internal world, where forces move and interact on the canvas. These are thought of as parallels for Feld. Two worlds: that of experience and that of painting, that are separate and distinct.

She says, "I may look at photos when starting, but at some point, everything I have in mind becomes secondary to what is in front of me. I just react to that instead of what I am thinking about."

Not everyone is taught to see. Certainly, Feld is the kind of artist who was taught to see from an early age—to observe and examine and appreciate, but also to see into the paint, to read what is happening in the painting and create a volatile structure—to translate something of experience into form and into art.

Feld describes one aspect of working through and seeing into a piece in progress in this way,

"Paintings can be put aside, they come and go over months. I will take one out, put it face to wall and turn it around quickly and in that split second I learn more about what to do with it than at any other time." She describes her working methods as "Planning combined with chance." This plan and chance method can often start by pouring paint on the canvas on the floor, then moving the canvas to control the paint's direction, making a start for the many decisions that follow.

This struggle of making paintings results in works that seem very much about being, just as the moments that inspire Feld are best realized in snapshots and sketches; images that capture a place in time, or state of being. This follows in their inspiration or conception as idea, then in their working out in paint and, finally in their being viewed or appreciated. They are exactly what they appear to be and the act of appreciating them compels a raising of one's awareness to see into what is there.

"I like the shapes trees make—the geometry of branches, the way things crisscross; the angle of things attracts me. Inclines and levels are more interesting to me—I'm not attracted when things are too flat."

Looking at her paintings, we can find these references, and look for what Feld calls "the tangles found in nature, the juxtapositions of line, shape, and form and the geometry it generates." We are faced with paintings that exult in color and movement but are also reminded of the sight of light and shadow outside. We search our minds to identify the memory of these forms, the visions we retain of the natural world that seem so essential, so vital to our wellbeing.

The exhibition draws mainly from works in three series of paintings; *Triangles in Nature*, *Pinball*, and *Flower Scribbles*, all done in the last two and a half years, along with a few new works fresh out of the studio. The *Pinball* and the *Flower Scribbles* canvases have a consistent dimension or height/width ratio within each series.

"Most of my painting life I have worked on square canvases. At the moment, the square feels too static to me. For the first time in many years, I am working on a series of paintings where the canvas is positioned in a "portrait" orientation. I am liking the tumbling movement, which for me conjures up the feeling of Chinese/Japanese ink paintings of waterfalls and descent from mountaintops, and in certain instances the high energy ricochet of a pinball in motion."

In the *Pinball* works, the vertical format in a slightly narrow, 4:3 ratio allows Feld to set up ascending masses of color/form, with whirling, calligraphic strokes working their way back and forth in a heaving rise and fall. In her painting, *Yellow Zoom*, the title color seems to have been poured out in a cloud on the canvas, yet layers of greys and whites around its edges both overlay and sit behind to define it. Wild slashes of umber leap into the foreground and stretch along the right side from top to bottom. Similarly, in both *Peach and Turquoise*, we see masses of those hues moving over a background of light, but the scattered dark strokes are more like flitting birds or twigs blown by wind. *Turbulent* reverses the pattern of dark and light, with flame-like strokes of luminous blue/white and earthy reds swirling over a dense purple/blue. Sparks of yellow punctuate the field, drawing your eye around the composition. In *Blossom Crush*, the space seems to open up into a warm glowing late day or early morning, rose and phthalo blue arch across the surface, building a vector pointing off the top. In *Unexpected*, *In Between*, and *Whitewashed*, alternately, backgrounds or foregrounds of darkness and light gather and play off one another. *Unexpected's* shreds of chalky primary colors come down like firework ash over cloudy deep space. *In Between's* rising Payne's grey and dark green masses work against the orange scattered in the sky, and *Whitewashed* builds a torrent of light as the title suggests.

For the *Flower Scribbles* series, Feld adjusts her approach. These are all square in format and the size varies slightly, six to ten inches smaller than the *Pinball* paintings. They have a more intimate sense that is in keeping with their inspiration. Feld placed the flowers, freesias, in a vase next to her while she painted, as she usually does, with the canvas hanging on one wall of her studio. In this way, she had them close, while not actually "painting" them. The scribbles—bunches of loose, often white, lines play over and under built-up patches of vibrant magenta and tangerine in one piece. Earth-red and grey tones are overwritten with sky blue in another. While they can be visually suggestive of photography, her calligraphic marks, lit up in the foreground over a soft-focus background, recall the rhythms and layered patterns in the free improvisation of sound found in jazz, another of Feld's sources of inspiration.

The *Flower Scribbles*, like all of Feld's work, also draw upon the abstract expressionist painters of the mid-twentieth century who were inspired by the free construction of jazz as well. Flowers have their own history in painting. For me, these works and the following series in this discussion bring to mind the rich vibrancy and strong contrasts of sun and deep shadow of Claude Monet's last works which opened the pathway for many innovative painters who followed, whereas Feld feels much

more strongly influenced by those later artists, such as Joan Mitchell, and says she is inspired by many of her contemporary painters as well. "There has been a whole lot of flower painting being done during the pandemic and for myself, I do associate my *Flower Scribbles* with the pandemic and bringing a bit of the outdoors into my studio. I've actually tried to work from flower "models" before but couldn't make it work until now. This time I was swept away by the freesia's rhythms and energy, which dovetailed nicely with my love of calligraphic line."

While the *Pinball* and the *Flower Scribbles* canvases have a consistent dimension within each series, the *Triangles in Nature* works vary in both size and orientation and feature the largest and some of the most dramatic works of the exhibition. With the terms, triangles, and nature Feld is setting herself some parameters and giving us some points of reference. However, she does not seem to be reigned in at all in these expressive, high energy works and that is a good thing. The powerful *Casting a Wide Net* gives us a sanguine tangle of coiled energy flying above poured greys and a wash of white, spiraling out, trailing across to the limits of the picture. Equally formidable, if not even more so, is the swirling, slashing cobalt column of *Tumbling*, like electricity coalescing and diffusing out into clouds surrounding it—while dark green gathers like a negative field seemingly given off. In the large square of *Green-Brown Marsh*, Feld's networks of poured paint create a tense, crackled gridwork upon which her whitest swipes of light move over her deepest spaces amid glowing blue and green flares. A similar structure creates the night and day of *Undergrowth* where the blackest pour of oil paint gives way to a brilliant clarity of pink effervescence. *Yellow Triangles*, *Hideaway*, *In the Clearing*, and *Big Mouth* are all landscape-oriented 36 x 48 inch canvases in which an emphatic build-up of a few colors is overwritten by contrasting strokes, forming structures that range from a triangular structure to twists and curves of paint freely moving across the surface.

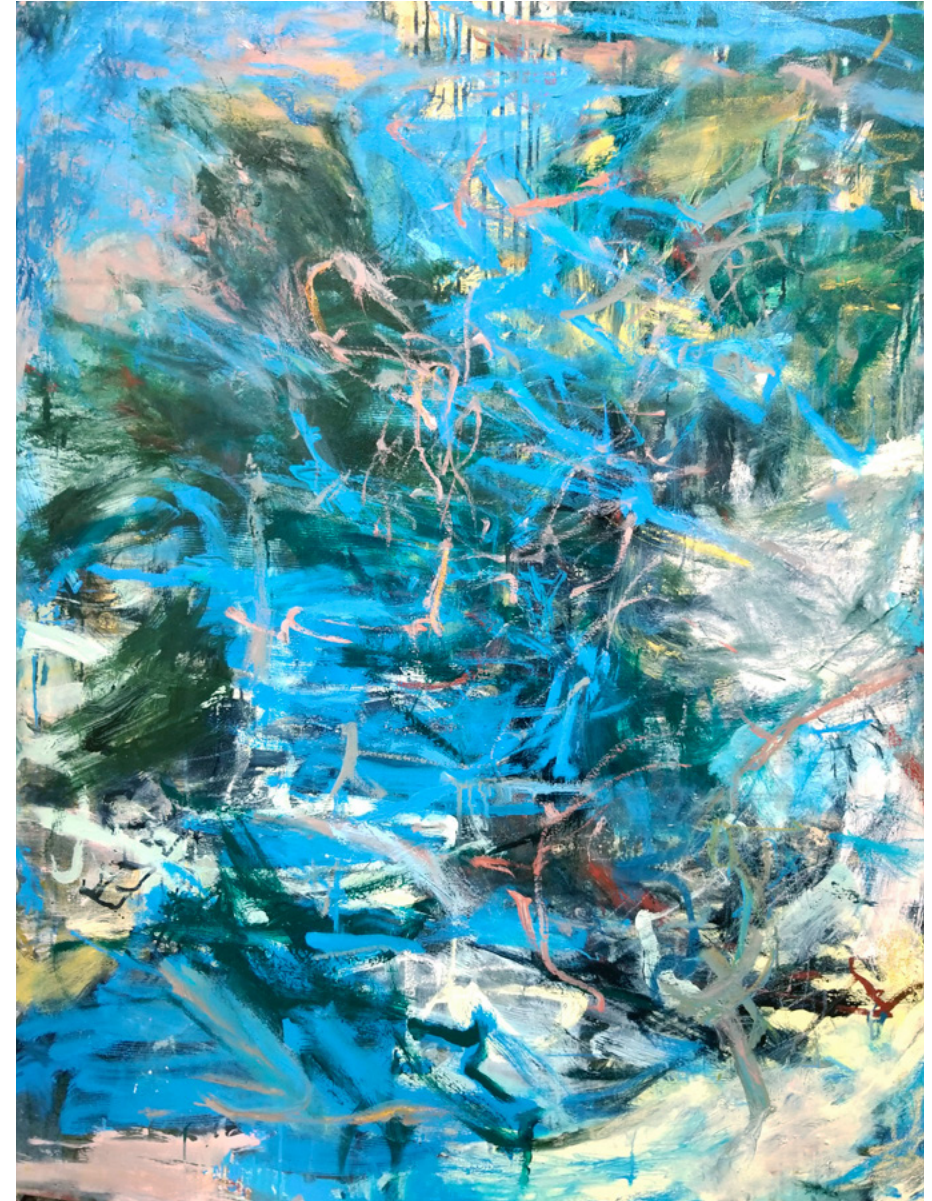
Feld's newest pieces, *Sky Forest* and *Room of Light*, with their expansive bold bursts of color structures, convince us even more of the accuracy of the exhibit title, *Energized*. It connotes the sense of living things in motion; the always-shifting shades of color on all we see, the rising and setting, the angle of the sun and the effects of wind and weather, the movement of the artist's hand and brush across the surface and the decisions made in paint that create images that embody restless, struggling growth—resulting in beauty that is also true and never simply pretty.

- James Pustorino, May 2021

*Yellow Triangles*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



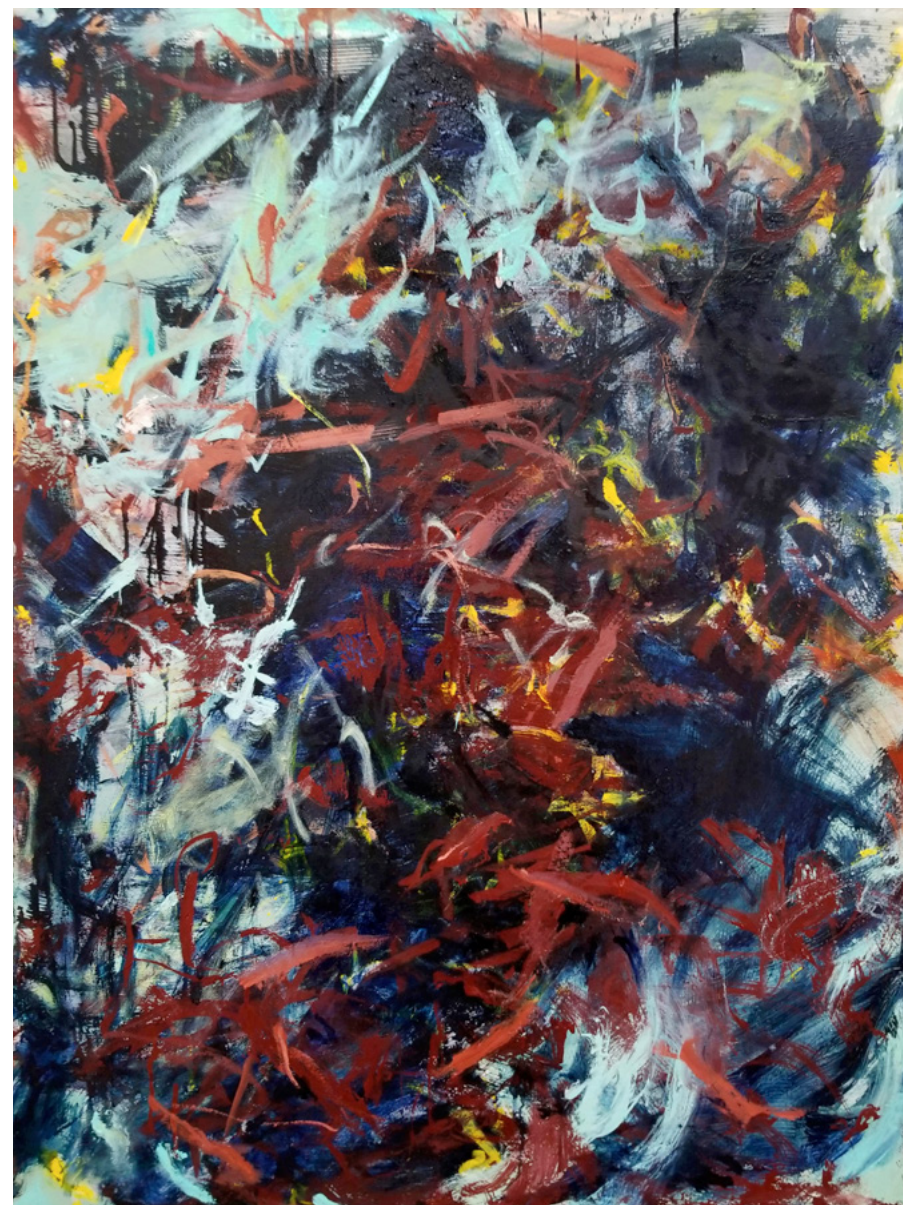
*Tumbling*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36"



*Yellow Zoom, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"*



*Turbulent*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"





*Hideaway*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



*Undergrowth*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



*Whitewashed*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"



*Blossom Crush*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"



*Unexpected*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"





*Flower Scribble 6, 2021, Oil on canvas, 20" x 20"*



*Flower Scribble 5, 2021, Oil on canvas, 20" x 20"*



*Flower Scribble 1, 2020, Oil on canvas, 24" x 24"*



*Flower Scribble 2, 2020, Oil on canvas, 24" x 24"*

*Room of Light*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36"





*Sky Forest*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36"



## Robin Feld

Robin Feld's work synthesizes the flow, movement, geometry and energy obtained through external and internal observation. Her work references 1950's abstraction seen through the lens of contemporary landscape painting and personal vision. More specifically, Feld looks to the crisscrossing and tangles found in nature, the juxtapositions of line, shape, form and the geometry it generates, as a structural jumping off point for working with balance, motion and fluidity within the framework of a two-dimensional surface.



Feld uses observational watercolor sketches, photography and automatic drawing as source material. Through the abandon of the big sweeping gesture or the bucket of poured paint coupled with more intimate calligraphic marks and descriptive line she seeks to evoke the sensation of being human in nature.

Feld works out of her studio in Brooklyn, New York. Her work has been shown at The Painting Center in New York, Drawing Rooms in Jersey City, Kent State University, Curate NYC, Art Fair 14C, Paramount Gallery at LIU, and the Monmouth Museum. She was recently featured in Jason McCoy Gallery's online Drawing Challenges XV & XVI. Feld attended the High School of Music and Art (LaGuardia High School) in Manhattan, received her BFA at the City College of New York, and studied at the Art Students League.

Dedicated to Michael Heinrich, who is greatly missed.

Catalogue Design: Shazzi Thomas

Curation: Shazzi Thomas

Essay: James Pustorino

