

White Light



“TipTop” (2020) by Jackie Battenfield. Acrylic on mylar panel, 40 x 72 inches. (Kevin Noble/Courtesy Addison/Ripley Fine Art)

Delicacy and spontaneity are essential to the appeal of watercolors, which is what Jackie Battenfield paints — sort of. The Brooklyn artist actually daubs plastic on plastic: diluted acrylic pigment on Mylar, on which the thinly pooled colors seem to remain liquid.

Her subjects, at least in several Addison/Ripley Fine Art shows whose latest is “White Light,” are flowering trees. The artist depicts these with an austerity reminiscent of classic East Asian nature painting. The backgrounds are all white, and many of the pictures seemingly employ just two colors. In fact, Battenfield initially mixes multiple hues together as one. Only as they dry do they separate into contrasting shades.

Derived from her own photographs, Battenfield’s paintings are realistic yet not literal. Their forms are streamlined, and their colors can appear bleached or unexpectedly bright. This suggests the effect of the artist’s vantage point, which is staring upward into the sun’s white light. Boughs emerge from the top in most of the compositions, which emphasizes the direction of the painter’s gaze. While Battenfield’s pictures are quiet and gentle, their perspective conjures a sense of awe.