

Excerpts from Essays on the Art of Michael Kessler

NEW WORK: NEW YORK /OUTSIDE NEW YORK, THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, NYC, 1984

Ned Rifkin, Under Secretary for Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

“Michael Kessler is making paintings that continue this legacy of searching for a fusion of natural laws and spiritual aspirations. Like Kandinsky's, Kessler's format is modest while his vision is expansive. The artist's yearning to synthesize the landscape within his imagination has yielded a strong and consistent body of work that verges on non-objective painting, but deliberately pulls back from that brink to incorporate the many empirical observations he makes during quiet hours spent in the woods. It is then and there that Kessler takes notice of how light and natural forms intermingle to create a realm that corresponds with hallucinatory or dream-like states of mind.”

PAINTINGS & DRAWINGS BY MICHAEL KESSLER, Charlotta Kotik Curator of Contemporary Art, The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

“Kessler, therefore, is a painter's painter, whose recognition of old masters and their ability to create gems of painting is best expressed by his admiration for the work of Vermeer. We can delve into his fantasy landscapes and not only contemplate the richness of the artist's imagination but uncover precious information hidden in our own unconscious which is freed by the artist's daring fantasy. Thus, Kessler leads us toward a new understanding of ourselves and of the world around us - the prime characteristic of a true artist.”

After Nature II, Trevor Richardson, Curator, 1999 , Herter Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts Amherst

“The formal dynamics of Kessler's surfaces are extremely complex. They are haunted by a misty, illusionistic depth, conjured by the application of successive layers of translucent color-sepia, umber, and white, on top of a ground of heavily worked gestural marks. Each layer of color is applied with varying degrees of pressure in order to reveal, to a greater or lesser extent, the presence of the underlying surface structure - with each new layer serving as a kind of visual record of the means by which it was created. However, the flexing movement between field and mark, suggests more that a push - pull creation of pictorial depth, it also generates a lyric planar elasticity across the picture's surface, in which everything appears muted, beautifully modulated into the texture of a soft-focus reverie.”

Art In America , 1997, Miriam Seidel

“Michael Kessler's handling of surface texture is strikingly accomplished. The range of his visual effects wide indeed, from long languidly curving drip forms and pooling blobs, to squeegeed foliate forms delicate as branch corals, to complex tortoise-shell swirls of compelling visual depth. The works in Kessler's two recent shows owe much to this textural virtuosity.”

ARTS MAGAZINE, May, 1987, **MICHAEL KESSLER**: DAVID CARRIER

“Within our art world Kessler thus is an eccentric figure, an extreme artist whose visionary art is initially frightening. We naturally associate visionary art with crazy outsiders—men or women whose loss of rationality puts them in touch with feelings we cannot recognize or express. But since Kessler is a disciplined, uneccentric person, a worldly man in the good sense of the word, what does it mean to characterize his work as extreme art? The extreme artist, as I use that phrase, is he or she who possesses the self-confidence to keep a distance from the mainstream culture. Kessler's vision of the artist as second nature would count for nothing were it not expressed in strikingly original paintings. “

Art in America, November 1987, *Michael Kessler* at *Jack Tilton Gallery*, New York City, *Jonathan Weinberg*

“It is precisely Kessler's talent for evoking a wide range of associations while remaining connected to the rigors of his craft and tradition that makes his paintings so strong. In these ambitious, fullscale abstractions Kessler isn't fighting with the painters he seems to admire most—Miro, Gorky and the early Pollock—but is instead slowly building on their achievements, in that difficult process of finding a sense of place and a voice that are his own. “

ARTFORUM, Feb. 1985, **MICHAEL KESSLER** (at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City), *JOHN YAU*

“The colors are like dawn; they are luminous to the point of being pleasantly excruciating. At the same time, it is not unusual to find a painting with a surface ranging from the impastoed to the scarred, scratched, burnished, or stained. Here, then, is a young artist with a metaphysical vision evolving out of Heraclitus; both see the world as a continuum undergoing relentless metamorphosis. Kessler expresses his inward vision by tapping into the metaphorical possibilities inherent in paint's materiality. “

Cleveland Free Times

MIND OVER MATTER
MICHAEL KESSLER'S SHIFTING
STORMS
by **Douglas Max Utter**

Published May 23-29, 2001

“For the most part, his complex technique tends to seek a sense of archaeological depth and accretion. His surfaces are soft and smooth, as if waxed, emulating the effect of encaustic. The resulting sensual, touchable quality lends this artist's otherworldly hues and textures an intimate force that is as surprising as it is effective. The eye is encouraged to travel into the paintings as if downward, through the lens of a microscope or into the trench of a scientific excavation.”

NEW ART EXAMINER. APRIL, 1987, *Barbara Krakow Gallery*, Boston

“Kessler's painting too is concerned with luminosity, but one which suggests the inner light or aura of vitality itself.”

“Kessler's dominant pitch is a rough and brooding one that for all its craftsmanship seems ingenuously earnest. This tone is keyed by his palette, which is grounded in earth colors, greens, and white, and in the restless undulance, spirals. and turnings of his forms. It is this last quality that most distinguishes Kessler's concern with earth processes, with the dialectical vitality celebrated in pre-Socratic metaphysics.”

who affirms earth's fierce exuberance.

Eugene Narrett

Vital Forces

Nature in Contemporary Abstraction, June 29 - August 25, 1991

The Heckscher Museum, Huntington, NY.

GREGORY AMENOFF

PETER BROWN

PETAH COYNE

ELISA D'ARRIGO

WILLY HEEKS

MICHAEL KESSLER

JANIS PROVVISOR,

MICHAEL TETHEROW

ELLEN WIENER

Michael Kessler creates luminous paintings rich with the vigor of the artist's touch. Multiple layers of paint in brilliant, often startling colors, are sanded and scratched to reveal a complex inner world of light and life, suggestive of strange microbes or magnified tissues.

Anna C. Noll, Curator

A Capricious Artistic Journey Beginning With Paint

Pasatiempo, *The New Mexican*, Oct. 3, 1997

Balancing Opposites in the Process

By Kathleen McCloud

“Michael Kessler's acrylic on board paintings undulate as if three demsional forms were breathing under the thick surface of paint. Viewed from the side, the beveled edges reveal stratified layers of color - a timeline of the painting's evolution.”

ARTS Magazine, January 1989

Michael Kessler at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City

“There is an 'impending sense of movement and metamorphosis, a competition, in a sense, between a past and future moment in these microscopic renditions of a present forever jelled on the wooden plane.”

Peggy Cyphers

Transcendental Spaces, Michael Kessler, Allentown Art Museum

“Kessler's metaphysical speculations were always about nature and frequently about science or sex. Kessler has, for the first time in these new paintings, accommodated imperfect geometries that describe the space man occupies in nature-albeit spiritually. In *Transcendental Spaces* Kessler has made a leap of faith, independent of doctrine, to explore the theme of ascension.”

SARAH ANNE McNEAR Associate Curator, Allentown Art Museum

Arts Magazine, Summer ,1984

MICHAEL KESSLER , at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City 3-28, 1984)

“Encompassing the broad tradition of Blakelock, Ryder, Dove and Burchfield, Michael Kessler's landscape paintings disclose a visionary interpretation of nature. His particular fascination is the perpetual cycles of evolution.”

By *RON WARREN*

ARTFORUM , APRIL 1987

Michael Kessler , Barbara Krakow Gallery , Boston

“Kessler's integration of organicism, fantasy, and sheer physical beauty produces paintings capable of implying that the seemingly anachronistic is in fact vital. Paradise may not be completely lost. imbued with the poignancy and erudition of the artist's vision, the natural world displays an indomitable spirit.”

NANCY STAPEN

Arts Magazine, December 1990, Michael Kessler at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City

“Although wholly abstract, Kessler's use of color and placement of forms suggests an erotic conjugation. In an age where the use of explicit sexual imagery is under attack, Kessler's abstract substitutes may well save the day. Kessler's work asserts the primacy of the whole surface. The creamy texture of the paint, as he pulls and slides and scrapes it, calls attention to the physicality of his support. In his hands the material of the paint takes on new importance. He makes us aware of the emulsion of pigment and oil as a physical substance laid on a surface.”

Ann-Sargent Wooster

Philadelphia Inquirer, Thursday, April 16, 1992

Michael Kessler at Schmidt/Dean Gallery. Philadelphia, Pa.

“Of all the contemporary artists who use nature as a basis for abstraction, none does so with more refinement than Michael Kessler. He defines nature broadly, so that nowhere in his paintings do you see specific allusions to it like the ones that Terry Winters uses. Yet his work usually communicates a sense of a fundamental order that operates outside human control, or even observation.”

Edward J. Sozanski

Art News, September 1990

MICHAEL KESSLER at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City

“The effect in each case is of a complex, shifting interaction of light and darkness taking place just beyond sight. The animation that results is, ultimately, romantic, and one has the sense that Kessler's acute attention to pigment and color is a result of his interest in a natural world that is subject to uneasy turmoil and ripe with a kind of lurid, devouring beauty. Yet it is exactly the conceit Kessler sets up-in which he regards esthetic artifice and the natural process as essentially the same expressive thing-that gives his work its meaning and edge”

Holland Carter