

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

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Bill Scott: *Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape*, 2010, oil on canvas, 46 by 67 inches; at Hollis Taggart.



BILL SCOTT HOLLIS TAGGART

Bill Scott's paintings have an atmosphere of ease, but consideration and reconsideration of beautiful form churn within them. *Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape* (2010) summarizes Scott's endeavor, its delightful title alluding to an image that somehow is richly descriptive while in fact depicting nothing. Maybe a white-over-blue passage turns into a patch of sky, and the lollipop shapes become trees, but that's as specific as it gets. The rest of the painting consists of colors that you would use to paint figures in a landscape if you adored Matisse. Scott has arranged them as an abstraction in medium- and high-key swatches. Upon this he has painted confident linear curves in a variety of darker hues. In another kind of painting those lines might denote a knee or a breast. Here they support the picture as structural notations that Scott has derived from a lifetime of immersion in painting.

Scott is a Philadelphian, and *Two or Three Nudes* is the product of a wrestling match with Renoir's *The Large Bathers* (1884-87) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "The space in Renoir's painting never

quite delivered the pleasure it seemed to promise," he says in the catalogue. It often happens that a perceptive artist will see a quality in a masterwork that he can neither accept nor deny. Solving the dilemma can lead to new, fruitful directions in his art.

Two or Three Nudes led to *Arcadian Landscape* (2010-11), and *Arcadian Landscape* to *City, Country, Sea* (2011). Each further sublimates Renoir's composition into Scott's abstract sensibilities.

Most of the other 20 works have no singular precedent, but they evince the same thorough investigation. There's a window theme that appears in *The Longed-For Pause* (2009) and, of course, in *Window* (2010), both constructed around framed, luminous rectangles. A window also hovers at the top edge of *April* (2009), glowing pink on a wall of gray and green. Such devices may have suggested a composition for *Summertime Weekends* (2010), with its laundry line of intense colors. In addition, several paintings are de facto though not literal forest scenes, such as *Imagined Paradise* (2009), and landscape is at least implied in every piece.

But the best ones stop nowhere, as a Zen teacher once described the action

of an awake mind. *Seafood Dinners with Micka and Ben* (2010) traverses the color wheel with scraped passages and leisurely lines. The only recognizable subject is joy.

—Franklin Einspruch