

The background is a white surface with several vertical, irregular veins of light blue and grey. Scattered throughout are numerous small, colorful speckles in shades of red, orange, yellow, green, and black. Some larger, darker, irregular shapes are also present, possibly representing ink splatters or organic forms. The overall effect is that of a marbled or speckled paper or fabric.

BARBARA LAUBE

Barbara Laube

A Breath Away

May 21 - June 15, 2019

Essay by Michael David

**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)

## A Breath Away

The title of this exhibition, *A Breath Away*, alludes to an inner prompting heard by the artist, "I am a breath away." The titles of the individual paintings, *When Air Becomes Breath* reference the beautiful memoir by Paul Kalanithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*. At the age of thirty-six, on the verge of completing a decade's worth of training as a neurosurgeon, Paul was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer and asks, what makes life worth living in the face of death? What do you do when the future is no longer a ladder towards your goal in life? Laube has reversed the sequence in her paintings as she has focused on the mindfulness found in rebirth rather than that of confronting death.

Laube's new work does not address any of the specifics in the book, but it does embrace an acceptance of a more mindful living in the moment. Her work features an openness that results in a free range of marks. This groundbreaking body of work is an evolution of her most recent solo exhibition *First Beach* at The Painting Center.

Laube's work has moved through degrees of figuration and landscape at different times in her practice. What has always been a constant is her search for the connection to a secular spirituality through the transformative act of painting. Her work brings to mind the great quote from Jackson Pollock to Hans Hoffman. Hoffman remarked to Pollock that he needed to work more from nature and Pollock replied, "I don't paint nature, I am nature."

These new paintings range from thick to thin, additive to subtractive, and impasto to the most delicate of veils. Laube has indeed become nature in that her work is beautiful, hideous, violent, dying, gentle, demonstrative, and fragile all at once.

One artist I associate Laube's lineage of work with is Milton Resnick. He was certainly influenced by late Monet landscapes and fused it with a deep quest for psychological and spiritual content and impossibly thick impasto. Laube's work also can be seen in context with her wonderful contemporary Rebecca Purdum. I believe Laube can be seen in the "truth can be found through the passion of impasto" school of painting, yet, she operates with different concerns and lets her own unique voice manifest louder and clearer in these new works.

There is a variation of marks and materials and an openness in the use of the diptych format in the paintings *When Air Becomes Breath 48"x 36"*, and *When Air Becomes Breath II 48"x 36"*. There is also a mastery between large and small with the more radical spare paintings such as *When Air Becomes Breath 38 18"x 24"* with its sparsity and veils creating the experience of a painting with the grand scale of a Morris Louis or Helen Frankenthaler. Or, *When Air Becomes Breath 52 10"x 10"*, with its impossibly dense, reworked, scarred surface.

The work features a search for personal meaning through a mark making which is immediate and open, and I believe these works are closely aligned to painters such as Louise Fishman and Joan Mitchell who rely on gesture and not surface. This comparison provides new insight into Laube's decades-long practice.

Laube works furiously on many pieces at once in multiple ways. She has added a severe use of subtraction, scraping away whole sections of paintings to keep her practice fresh. This subtraction and the openness it creates further separates her from the school of impasto and the painters who created the "wall" that she may have been previously considered a part of.

She may rework a painting for years and then take the scraped remains from one painting and embed them as markers or points of light and color in a painting that has nothing to do with the original. She will lay fresh canvas on the floor beneath the other paintings she is working on, creating a controlled state of improvisation (akin to the way John Cage composes music), letting the freedom of gravity participate in the creation of these works. In her powerful, large diptychs, which question the notion of time and spatial relativity itself, she uses both of these ways of working.

Laube's multiple processes and approaches has actualized her search for a greater acceptance of self and all the complexities of life. There is a triumph of adversity we all face and is made manifest in her new work. She looks for the truth (which is always relative) in her work and the equivalency of those 'truths' found in the search for connection in spiritual practice in her life and painting.

She continues to take great risks in her work to find that true moment. She has taken a great leap and I believe her time has arrived. As viewers, it is our time to look at this work and consider her as a painter of profound meaning and beauty. She is now part of the dialogue with renowned contemporaries who make painting crucial at the end of the second decade of the 21st Century.

It is my hope this exhibition of these works at The Painting Center will create the platform for a greater audience for Laube's work and her participation in that dialogue.

Michael David, 2019



*When Air Becomes Breath 7, 2018*  
oil paint, gold and silver leaf on panel  
18 x 24 inches

*When Air Becomes Breath*, 2018  
oil paint, silver leaf on panel  
48 x 36 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 3*, 2018  
oil paint, gold and silver leaf on panel  
16 x 20 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 9, 2018*  
oil paint, silver leaf on panel  
18 x 24 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 11, 2018*  
oil paint, silver leaf on panel  
10 x 10 inches





*When Air Becomes Breath 21, 2018*  
oil paint, silver and gold leaf on panel  
10 x 10 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 6*, 2018  
oil paint, silver leaf on panel  
11 x 14 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 13, 2018*  
oil paint, silver leaf on panel  
10 x 10 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 33, 2019*  
oil paint, gold and silver leaf on panel  
11 x 14 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 35, 2019*  
oil paint on panel  
10 x 10 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 37, 2018*  
oil paint on panel  
18 x 24 inches



*When Air Becomes Breath 2*, 2018  
oil paint, gold and silver leaf on panel  
48 x 36 inches



## Barbara Laube

For me the act of painting is spiritual, shamanistic (healing), and transformative. "Truth" is found through process and the materiality of paint. Rooted in the history of Abstraction, my subject matter may not be obvious; and always left open to interpretation. It emerges from the rhythm of my endless mark making and adjustments to the surface, and the play between intentionality and the use of the subconscious.

This struggle oftentimes reveals an imagery that reflects my relationship to the outside world and my life, whether it be a landscape where my Mother's ashes have been scattered, a self-portrait, a waterfall that heals, or just my deep love of great painting and my connection to it's history and future. In the end, the act of painting and paint itself is first and foremost and has always been my way of making sense of my life, who I am, what I love and what I believe in.

The view outside the studio windows of the Palisades and Hudson River has emerged recently in Barbara Laube's work. This is where Laube has lived for thirty years. She has always painted. Her decades long painting practice has taken her to Italy, France, Spain, Germany and South America. Barbara Laube has shown widely in New York and will have a solo show this Fall at M.David and Co.

[www.barbaralaube.com](http://www.barbaralaube.com)

Opposite page: Barbara Laube's Studio 2019



Designer: Shazzi Thomas  
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