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Nature inspires Brooklyn-based painter

By **EMILIE SHUMWAY**
Tribune Staff Writer

Three Oaks?

Hardly.

More like a forest or two — and glens, ponds and bushes.



Those and other natural settings all make up the landscape of Brooklyn-based Amy Talluto's artwork, which will be on [exhibit](#) from Saturday through Sept. 12 at Studio B. Gallery in Three Oaks in collaboration with Chicago's Packer Schopf Gallery.

"I really love the flexibility of landscape," says, pointing out that portraiture tends to be a more sensitive subject, with a smaller margin of error. "In my work, the actors are almost like actors on a stage. There's a lot of raw material you can play with; you can push it almost to an abstract. Sometimes, you just find the craziest forms in there."

The inspiration for Talluto's exhibition, "The Devil's Dream," came during time she spent at various artist residencies in Wyoming, Montana and Woodstock, N.Y. While in residency, she would disappear into the surrounding forests and glens with an Olympus "point-and-shoot" digital [camera](#) and emerge with a set of images ready to be downloaded onto her laptop and reinterpreted in paint.

Photography is a trick that allows Talluto to keep in mind an image of the original setting ("a loose blueprint") without necessarily feeling committed to the correctness of its every detail.

"Realism has such a powerful pull. This helps free me from realism a little bit," she says, noting that, in person, nature tends to be so awe-inspiring that it can feel unfaithful to take liberties in its representation. (Although it also helps, she points out, not to be "at the mercy of mosquitoes.")

Focusing on the "found object," Talluto searches out natural scenes that come to life somehow — whether they speak with a sense of humor or leave an eerie aftertaste.

"I look for moments of personification of animism — something striking and strange," she says. "I try to recapture and bring out that first feeling I felt when I experienced it."

For Talluto, this doesn't imply a perfect rendering. In fact, the fragile colors of the scene are often distorted by the limited colors of the [computer](#), and they're warped again if the image is printed — "I have to stop myself from painting everything in magenta."

Red appears with frequency in her paintings, and often with striking effect. The color of pulsating hearts and poisonous frogs, red delivers a strange, affecting blow to many of Talluto's paintings. One of these (titled, in a telltale strategy, "Heart") depicts a pool with chaotically white ripples. Near the center-top, a small waterfall dumps water into the scene, and the heavily red accents suggest that this is the life-blood of the setting. Looking at the strangely enlivened painting, one realizes no other name would make sense.

"Color can be used to change the mood of a painting, and red can really enhance the moment in a work," Talluto says. "I think red is my home base."

Another enhancer she points to is the role of yellow in "Sweet William," an immensely detailed work that predominantly features textured green bushes on a hillside — a lush and relaxing scene. In the left corner, one sees a snippet of the sky, a sapped and sickly yellow that suggests fading.

"The yellow gives it a bit of an eerie quality," she says.

As an oil painter, Talluto makes texture an important element of each painting's experience.

"I was a little bit tired of my work when I had a very consistent surface," she says.

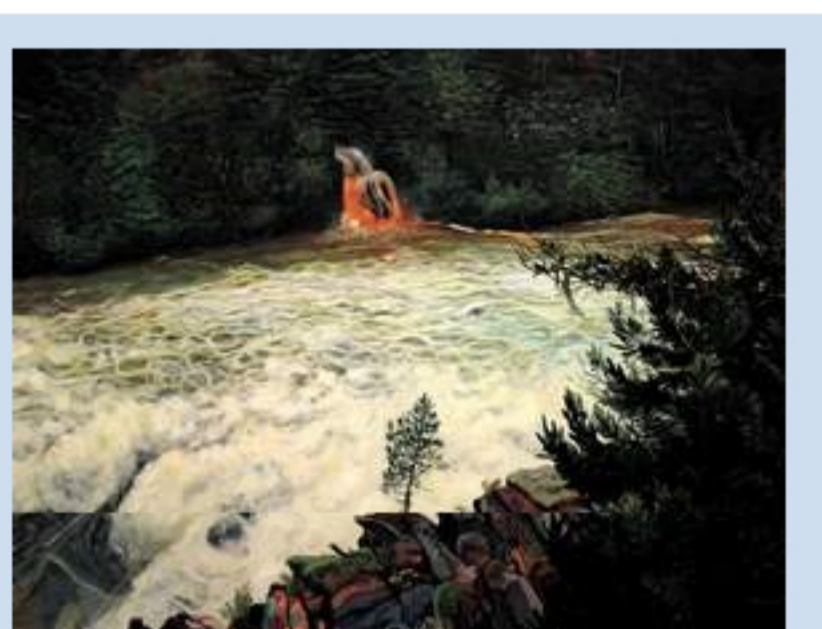
Her work in "The Devil's Dream" exhibits a variety of depths and textures. She leaves an area of thin paint, which she refers to as "air holes," for an element of "breathability."

Other parts of the canvas are dominated by thick paint and heavily textured detail work, which can take, for the larger paintings, anywhere from two to six months. (Her smaller works, at about 11-by-14 inches, take a week on average.)

Talluto's oil paints play a role in her creative process beyond providing texture — because the oils dry so slowly, she can return to a painting after a day or two, and wipe away and revise sections of the canvas. Because Talluto pays close attention to detail, the ability to continually change and improve upon her work is important to her.

"At first, it's agony, trying to decide how to start," she says about the beginning stages of her paintings. "Then the middle is rewarding. All these little pulls are coming from the painting, telling you what to do. Finally, at the end, you get a transcendent feeling.

"Once you do it, you're hooked," she says. "It's kind of like a drug."



"Heart" by Amy Talluto will be one of the paintings featured in an exhibition by the Brooklyn-based artist at Packer Schopf Gallery/Studio B in Three Oaks from Aug. 15 to Sept. 12, 2009.

More Information

On exhibit

Amy Talluto's "The Devil's Dream" opens Saturday and continues through Sept. 12 at Studio B., 114 N. Elm St., Three Oaks. Hours are from noon to 8 p.m. Fridays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays and noon to 6 p.m. Sundays. Admission is free. For more information, call (269) 756-9954 or visit the Web site [studiobgallery.com](#).

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