

Squiggly landscapes: Ryan Nord Kitchen

The great French Impressionist master Claude Monet said, "For me, a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment..." Brooklyn-based artist Ryan Nord Kitchen paints landscapes, but is similarly unconcerned with the physical likeness and specificity of a place. Instead, Ryan is interested in the traces and memories of a landscape that remain with him over time; when the post-card picture has faded. Working in a visual language influenced by rhythm and percussion, Ryan punctuates the surface of the linen canvas with loose gestural marks and flat colors. The quality of his linework, sketchy and squiggly, is full of movement, as if the landscape were vibrating.

In some works, the landscape seems to dissolve into abstraction completely. Prompted by the titles of the paintings, the lines and colors solidify into markers of the landscape. Ryan is interested in the blurred line between these two modes of expression, and believes that the two are less distinct than often imagined.

Working on either 15 x 12 inch or 24 x 21 inch canvases, Ryan offers neither a representational window on the world nor grand painterly gesture. His language of scribbles, lines and dots is distinctly democratic, where depth is flattened and raw linen and ground become negative marks occupying compositional space alongside the brushstrokes. The compositions are characterised by a rhythmic balance between restraint and gusto, which keep the eye dancing around the painting tracing the movement.

Born in Minnesota, Ryan lives and works in New York. He received an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and has exhibited his work nationally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions. We spoke with Ryan about finding a place within the canon of landscape painting, making honest work and music.

interview by Layla Leiman

Featured image:

Ryan Nord Kitchen
South Slope 1
oil on linen
45 x 36 inches





Photo by Lú Wèi Jiā

AMM: Hello Ryan! To begin, can you share with us any people or experiences that have influenced you as an artist? In what ways has this shaped the direction of your work?

RNK: My formal art education took place in two distinct environments that together have had a lasting effect. The school I attended in the Midwest was nestled in a landscape spared by the glacial drifts of the last ice age. The cold streams, waterfalls, and river valleys that surrounded the small school were directly referenced in my earliest work. Years later the geometry and reality of Baltimore further cemented my interest in the experience of space in painting.

AMM: We read in an interview that you started out as a musician. This is really interesting, as there is a distinct rhythm to your mark-making. Please tell us more about how music influences you and your work.

RNK: As a kid I took weekly piano lessons, and some dance before focusing on percussion for around 15 years. These studies made me very sensitive to the tactile experience of syncopation and polyrhythm. This sensitivity now informs my approach to visual composition. I'm always tapping along to music.

AMM: Your paintings seem to dance between pure abstraction and figuration. What does working between these two modes of expression offer you?

RNK: Painting has the ability to draw attention to such distinctions. I believe more of our lives than we sometimes realize walk a similarly thin line. It's my attempt to make the experience of the paintings resonate deeply.

AMM: There's a looseness and deliberate naivety in your compositions. What informs your approach to linework and brushstroke?

RNK: This handling of the medium is an attempt to form a relatable entrance point for the viewer. I want the work to be approachable, and honest. I'm not interested in an experience in which the viewer is distracted by questions of craft. "Wow it looks just like a photograph!" is very boring to me unless the technical skill is in use of something further.

AMM: What is your approach to color in your work?

RNK: Color is one way I negotiate that balance between abstraction and figuration. In one place a color will match an expectation of what color a recognizable form should be, and in another I can deliberately subvert the immediate reading of a shape by changing what color it reflects.

AMM: The exposed linen draws attention to surface materiality in your painting. Can you tell us more about this?

RNK: The decision to size, but not prime the

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– Ryan Nord Kitchen

surface white or another color has been an attempt to bring attention to the painting's place within the viewer's reality. It has been important for me that the work is registered on the wall as a distinct and real object, and not simply as an image to be viewed.

AMM: What is the relationship between drawing and painting in your practice?

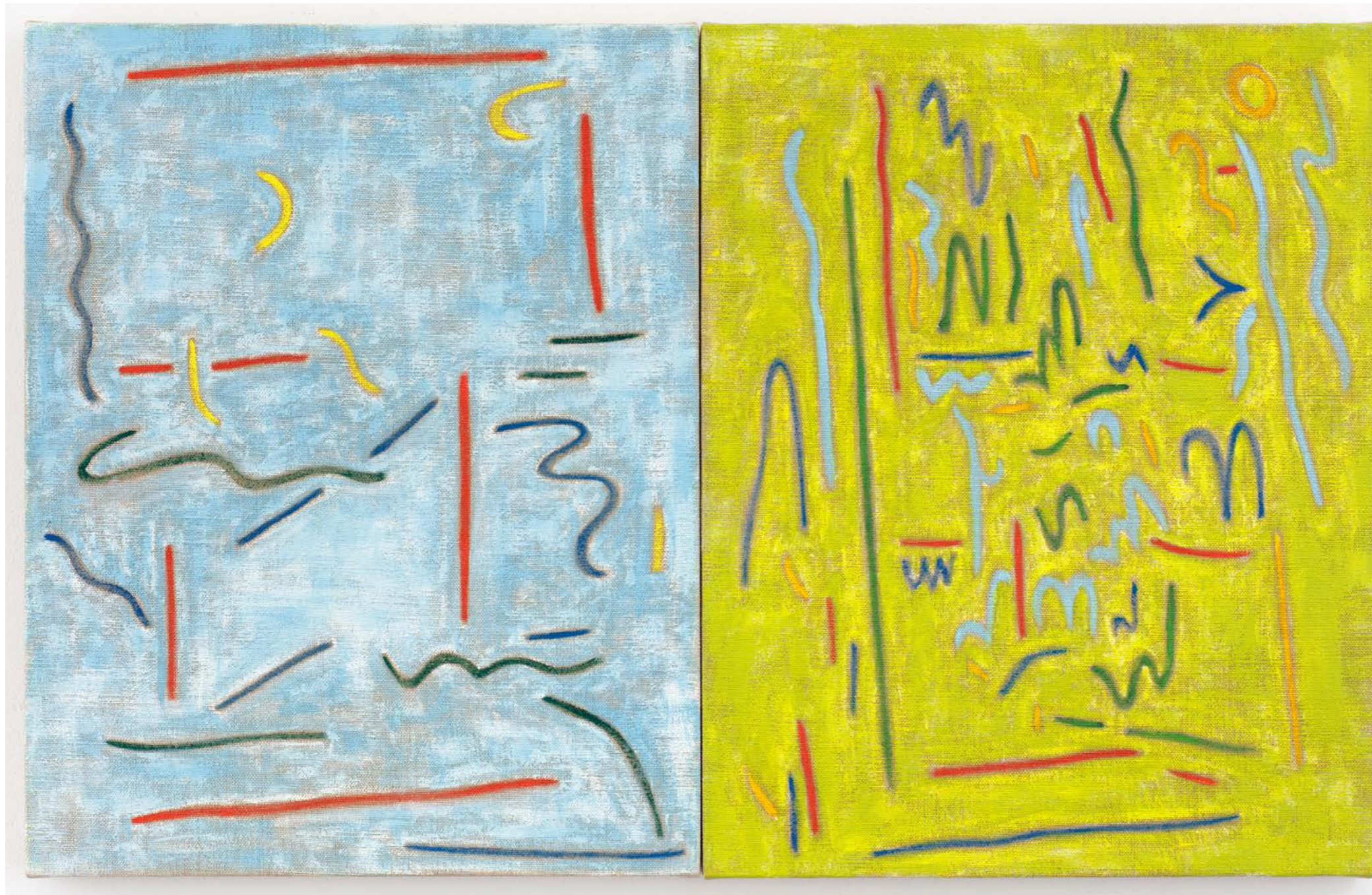
RNK: I find drawing to be more immediate, and it's been an important part of my life for longer than I've been painting. I still spend more time drawing than painting. The paintings all begin with a sketch.

AMM: You seem to favour working on square canvases. What appeals to you about this format?

RNK: My two favorite sizes are 15 by 12 inches, and 24 by 21 inches. The slightly off-square shape lets me play with compositional balance in ways that keep me interested. The relatively small size avoids the problem larger paintings encounter of becoming a spectacle. It connects to the way I want the paintings to be approachable. I hope the small size encourages a closer examination and intimacy.

AMM: What does a typical day in studio for you look like?

RNK: Recently I've been working on large groups of paintings at once. Allowing



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Walk
 oil on linen
 15 x 24 inches

permutations within a concept to spread quickly and without self-doubt has been fruitful for me. Working on five at once with the expectation that one or two will be successful allows for greater risks.

AMM: What led you to landscape painting, and what keeps you interested?

RNK: I find that landscape is one of the most relatable genres. It allows me to offer something to the viewer that they can bring their own experience into. I'm more interested in sharing something than I am in showing something.

AMM: As one of the classical genres, where do you see your work positioned within the trajectory of landscape painting?

RNK: I was told in school that "there's nothing left to say with landscape painting". I disagree. I think it has as much to say as ever.

AMM: Do you paint en plein air, or from photographs you've taken or sources? Do you sketch and plan paintings before beginning or allow works to proceed more organically? What is your process of working?

RNK: It's been important for me to let preliminary sketches develop from memories of experiences. I'm not concerned with a physically accurate depiction of the place. I'm interested in what remains with me and why.

AMM: What ideas are you currently exploring in your work?

RNK: I'm looking into ways to be more specific. I want to develop the vocabulary in a way that builds off the previous work without nullifying it.

AMM: In your development as an artist, what have been some of the key things you've learned, in college or beyond?

RNK: To answer to yourself first. It's not worth the effort otherwise.

AMM: How has your art changed over time? What directions do you imagine potentially exploring in the future?

RNK: I think it's always been a reflection of my mental state. It grows as I do. Some days I feel I understand it, and others it's ahead of me. I hold on as best I can. There is no predicting it.

AMM: What are you watching, listening to and reading right now?

RNK: I've been watching people play video games from the mid 1990s online. The early years of digital three dimensional space fascinate me. I like the rhythm of the low-resolution texture mapping. The developers were able to convey space with very limited resources.

Lana Del Rey's "High by the Beach" on repeat.

I just finished William Gibson's "Idoru" on the subway this afternoon.

AMM: Do you have any exciting projects coming up? What's next for you?

RNK: An upcoming third solo show with Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, a month-long residency at the Macedonia Institute, and some other tentative opportunities around the corner.



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Lake
oil on linen
24 x 21 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Sky View
oil on linen
24 x 21 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Coastline
oil on linen
24 x 21 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Field in Spring
oil on linen
24 x 21 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Dusk
oil on linen
24 x 21 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Setting
oil on linen
48 x 36 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Orchard 1
oil on linen
15 x 12 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Garden
oil on linen
15 x 12 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Garden 6
oil on linen
15 x 12 inches



Ryan Nord Kitchen
Flower Painting 3
oil on linen
12 x 10 inches