

# BURNAWAY

The Voice of Art in the South

## In Poetic Works, Maysey Craddock Transports Gulf Coast to New York

By Jean Dykstra

*Burnaway*

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Maysey Craddock took the title of her show, “Langsam Sea,” from a poem by Anne Michaels, which reads, in part: “In time, night after night, we’ll begin to dream of a langsam sea, waves in slow motion, thickening to sand.” A German term, often used in musical notation to direct the musicians to play slowly, “langsam” also describes the gradual but inexorable pace of change along the Gulf coastline.

Craddock is from Memphis and New Orleans, and spends time in Perdido Bay, Alabama, where her family has visited for generations. Her atmospheric paintings are based on photographs she took of the dense, tangled vegetation along the water in Perdido Bay. The coast was hard hit by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, not to mention the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, and these events are a kind of undercurrent in this exhibition. The gouaches—watery scenes of trees or a welter of roots and branches in muted tans, golds, blues, and sometimes black and white—are painted on pressed brown paper bags that Craddock stitches together with silk thread. The bags give the paintings a sculptural, tactile feel—the blue company logo is visible, the edges are ragged and serrated, the paper is wrinkled, the canvases are unevenly shaped.

Craddock is influenced by the practices of self-taught artists like Bill Traylor, who drew on pieces of cardboard, and she gently exploits the contrast between the everyday, lowbrow material of the paper bags and the delicate skein of branches and waterways that she paints. Her images are impressionistic, summoning the idea of reflection, literally and figuratively. *Quiet in the dusk*, 2015, and *Saltlines*, 2015, the former black gouache on paper, the latter white gouache on paper, are Rorschach-like shapes in which each side is a mirror image of the other. In *slipping through a coral sea*, 2015, we seem to be gazing down through glimmers of light on the surface of the water to the roots underneath. The paintings’ delicacy contrasts with the durability and ordinariness of the paper-bag canvases, a fitting way to conceptualize the landscape of the Gulf Coast—equal parts robust and fragile.