

TWO COATS OF PAINT

Award-winning blogazine, primarily about painting

[Home](#)

[About / Contact](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Support](#)

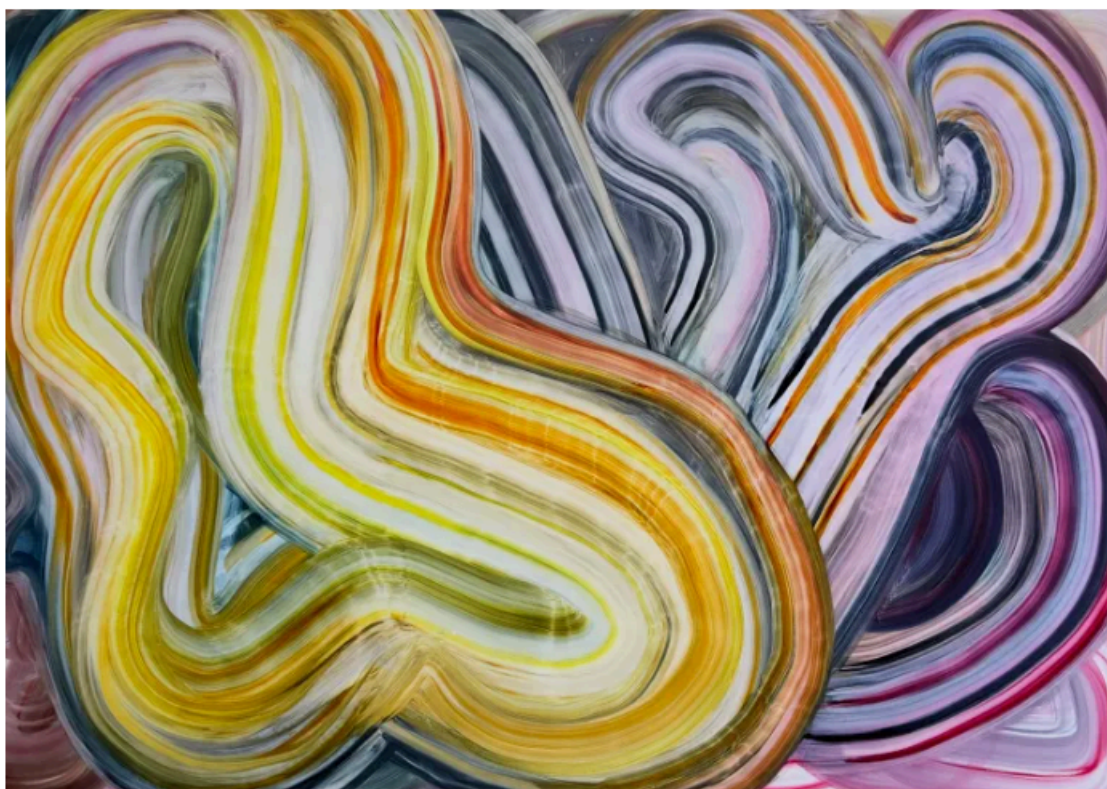
[Two Coats Conversations](#)

[Obituaries](#)



Fran O'Neill: Gestural heroine

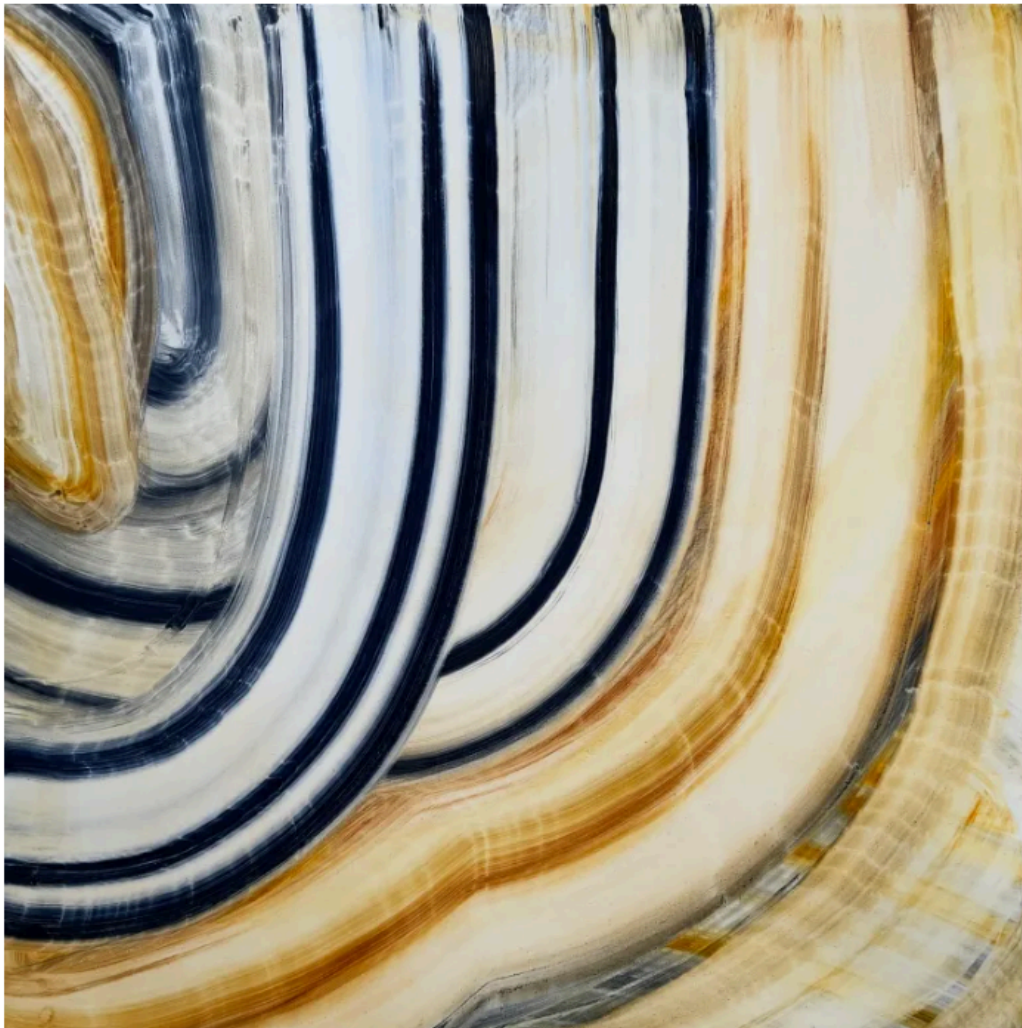
November 15, 2022 4:55 pm



Fran O'Neill, shape of things, 2022, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 inches

Contributed by Riad Miah / The eleven oil paintings in **Fran O'Neill's** solo show "Left Turn" at Equity Gallery traffic in vivid, vibrant gestures of color that form softly curved, ribbon-like shapes. While they bring to mind artists like **James Nares**, **Karin Davie**, and **David Reed**, O'Neill's energetic but self-consciously controlled brushstrokes and honed sense of color and light more directly suggest instants of becoming or emergence. Reaching back so full-bloodedly to revisit gestural painting,

and to exploit the expressive potential of abstraction and the flexibility of its formal attributes, somehow seems heroic.



Fran O'Neill, soft fold, 2021, oil on canvas, 35 x 35 inches

Over the past decade, O'Neill's visual vocabulary has evolved and settled. Working alone in rural Australia during the better part of the last two years, riding out the worst of the pandemic, may have been a factor. Her ease and patience with her materials and process are manifest on the canvas. The paintings invite the viewer to keep looking and tease out the combined significance of mark, color, and light. Her approach to mark-making, though dramatic enough, is not aggressively expressionistic, leaving psychic space to contemplate immediate content in a larger, imagined organic context.



Fran O'Neill, up swing, 2021, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches

O'Neill composes her paintings with large swaths of color that seem to glide across the canvas. Dynamic short of explosive or spontaneous, they reveal deliberate steps in her painting process. In many works, there are stuttering passages. For instance, in the four-foot-square *golden travel*, a bold squiggle hesitantly proceeds over the surface of the canvas, pausing at the the upper center seemingly to ensure the precision the artist must have in mind. As the brush continues, now in blue-gray, there is another pause for discretionary reflection. Patience is the key here and, like O'Neill's use of lower-case titles, it suggests modest, everyday moments that are nonetheless worthy of noting and recording.



Fran O'Neill, *golden travel*, 2021, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

Not inconsistently with this rather humanistic idea, there are hints of figuration in O'Neill's work. Her use of intense color with tonal variation suggests a figure-ground relationship, reinforced by shifts in the width of the brushstrokes. The very large painting *low hang* highlights this quality. Uniform folds of black and white marks hover in front of a darker gray backdrop in a shallow yet dimensional space. Likewise, in the smaller *taking stock*, the dominant scythe-like purple shape is formed from a series of urgent marks, below which softer U-shaped marks seem to recede. This distinctive visual play recalls the work of **Leslie Vance**, another artist whose work has demonstrated the versatility of the picture plane.



Fran O'Neill, low hang, 2022, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 inches



Fran O'Neill, untitled, 2021, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches

Also of special note is O'Neill's attention to her canvases' edges. Gestural brushstrokes seem to exit, enter, or turn away from the edge. In *untitled*, dark gray and black whooshes materializing from one edge and averting the other curve and twist before resolving into a rock-like structure. Such finely parsed gestures reflect the will and agency of the artist herself. That is arguably what this fine and thought-provoking show is mainly about.

"Fran O'Neill: Left Turn," Equity Gallery, 245 Broome Street, New York, NY.
Through December 4, 2022.

About the Author: Artist and educator **Riad Miah** was born in Trinidad and Tobago and now lives and works in New York City. He has exhibited with Lesley Heller Workspace, Rooster Gallery, and Sperone Westwater Gallery, among others.

NOTE: Two Coats of Paint 2022 Fundraising Campaign is underway. If you enjoy *Two Coats of Paint's* art coverage, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution. Help keep the painting conversation going in 2023. Thank you! [Click here to contribute.](#)

Tags: [Equity Gallery](#), [Fran O'Neill](#), [Left Turn](#), [Riad Miah](#)