

**Forest (4)**

Acrylic on Panel | 48 x 72 inches



Using between 20 and 100 microlayers of paint, **Michael Kessler** creates contemporary abstract paintings referencing the natural environment. Using tools he designed, Kessler strove for years to move the conversation about art forward.

“It’s been a long and wonderful journey,” he says. “In some ways it’s coming full circle. I grew

up in a small, rural setting in Pennsylvania and as a teenager I was moved by Andrew Wyeth’s work.” He wandered around in the farmland and painted trees. He looked deeply at the forest floors and the way the light fell. But he still had a long way to go to find his own voice. After living amidst the avant-garde art world of New York City, Kessler moved West.

“In the end I wanted to find a way to make a good painting,” he says. “I spent my life trying to prove painting is still viable, exciting, pertinent and important.”

In his current series, *Forest*, he moves from immersion in the landscape to a color-grasp of physics, where he brings us into a dimension seemingly impossible through a two-dimensional surface. Like the infinite layers of organics in the

**Redlands (1)**

Acrylic on Panel | 80 x 60 inches



*Upstream*

Acrylic on Panel | 48 x 90 inches

woodland ground, Kessler's many layers bring a new understanding of the systematic complexity of life on a cellular level.

"It's heavily layered work," Kessler says. "I chose to work in acrylics because I was invited to experiment with plastic paint. I use a process of layering that did not exist before I started doing it."

In terms of the imagery, he wanted to be able to go back and forth from hard-edge Minimalism to representational imagery. "I wanted to work on a continuum," he says. "My process allows me to go back and forth and not sacrifice any integrity. I wanted to be free to navigate throughout the painting."

Before he began *Forest*, he had another idea for his newest series, but once he began walking in the southern Utah forests, lying down on the floor and gazing up through the foliage, he found himself making paintings of the woods. "My process was very keyed up and ready to paint the woods," he says. "I didn't have to invent any new techniques, everything

I knew about paint — the drips and the runs, the puddles, all of it — it turned into trees. It was magical. All of sudden I'm engaged. I'm going for more walks. Then I come back to the studio. Back and forth. It's the most honest thing I can do right now."

And so he comes full circle. Back to the woods he dreamt of in his youth. "These are paintings first and depictions of the forest second," Kessler says. "These are not illustrations

of the woods, these are paintings. It's about innovation and they advance the notion that painting can still go somewhere. It's pretty exciting."

Kessler's work appears in museum collections including the Broad Foundation in Los Angeles, California, and the Museum of Fine Art in Boston, Massachusetts. He is represented by Ann Korologos Gallery in Basalt, Colorado; Gallery Mar in Park City, Utah; Schmidt/Dean Gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Nuart Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Sense Fine Art in Menlo Park, California.

— M.C.

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