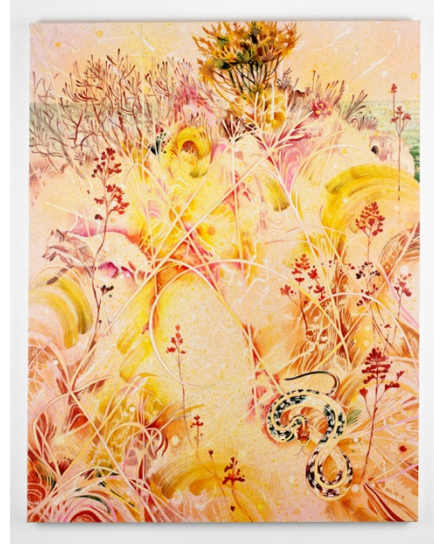


Hilary Irons

A Place of Greater Safety

October 10 – November 9, 2024

Reception: Thursday October 10, 6-8pm



She wondered if he had been very frightened: if pushed and driven by the crowds he had forgotten the calm at the eye of the storm, the place of safety at the living heart of all the close designs.

–Hilary Mantel, "A Place of Greater Safety"

At the center of motion is a silent core of stillness; in the midst of growth and change is a thread of steady transcendence that moves in and out of visibility. *A Place of Greater Safety*, Maine-based painter Hilary Irons' first show with Morgan Lehman, takes its title from Hilary Mantel's 1992 novel of the same name, and its thematic content points to the sanctuaries found hidden within turbulence.

In Irons' paintings – images of landscapes, flowers, shells, and the ephemera of the built environment – negative space becomes a home for a steady, reliable refuge from the clamor of growth. Over an atomized spray of warm colors and abstract stencils, Irons builds compositions in colored pencil, acrylic, and oil paint, with marble dust imparting light-absorbing sparkle and optical transcription informing invention. A sense of dissolving boundaries and flickering colors gives way, here and there, to the clarity of natural form, and in these brief moments of precision we find respite from the world and its roving entropy.

Irons' work focuses on the stories that arise between forms, both natural and created. Beneath a proscenium of seaside trees, a bicycle rack assumes the role of a glowing, glyph-like megalith. Ghostly shells that once provided safe homes for small creatures are now emblematic of loss, embodied in their bleached, elegant, vacated forms. The void provides a new tenant – our search for a life force beyond death. Flowers, famously ephemeral, let us rest in their brightness before leading us into the hypnotic dark spaces within the framework of their architecture. Stars fracture into bursts of brightness and candle flames resolve into bubbles of light that illuminate dark planes. Images of animals place the conscious intention of foxes, bats, dogs, donkeys, and other creatures in the churning heart of the landscape. Irons' images of glass swans – safely nestled between the sharp rocks, twisting beach peas, and thorny junipers of a Maine island – combine animal and object to explore the unexpected forms refuge can take. The place of greater safety is always there: concealed in the center of a changing world.

Hilary Irons is a Maine-based painter and curator. She is gallery and exhibitions director at the University of New England. Hilary received an MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2008 and a BFA from Parsons School of Design in 2002, and she has attended residencies at the Albers Foundation, Skowhegan, MacDowell, the American Academy in Rome, the Pace House, Hewnooks, Canterbury Shaker Village, and the Surf Point Foundation. She has written for *The Chart*, *Art New England*, *Boston Art Review*, and other publications. Her work revolves around opticality, the landscape, and material culture, exploring the ways in which our reading of space and object are impacted by color, mark, and light.

Hilary Irons, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, 2023, Oil, acrylic, and marble dust on panel, 28h x 22w in, 71.12h x 55.88w cm