

Marshall Crossman *Big Water*

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Dolby Chadwick Gallery is pleased to announce *Big Water*, an exhibition of new paintings by Marshall Crossman. Just over a decade ago, in 2000, Crossman and her family left San Francisco for the coastal community of Pacifica, twenty miles south of the city. Her current home, which is on the beach and overlooks a fishing pier and bait shop, is situated as close to the Pacific Ocean as one can get. The distinctive sensory experiences afforded by the location have become an important source of inspiration for Crossman, who employs an abstract language to describe life along the ocean's edge.

Crossman's *Beach* series is comprised of two different though related bodies of work. The first trajectory originally grew out of a fascination with polaroids found at the local bait shop that featured proud fisherman with their catches. Although not a fishing enthusiast herself, Crossman was drawn to the way the sun and salty air had drained the snapshots' colors and distorted their content (often already out of focus to begin with) in a painterly way. Crossman deftly translates these effects in her paintings via her signature wet-on-wet style that employs brushes, palette knives, and other, more makeshift, tools such as the edge of a piece of cardboard. In this physical and often risky process, Crossman works across the surface all at once, continuously applying and wiping away paints to access the vibrant, though largely unknown, under-painting below. In a manner reminiscent of David Park, the facial features of Crossman's fisherman are doubly obliterated: first by the polaroids' susceptibility to environmental conditions and then by the obfuscating effects of the artist's brush. Interestingly, it is the fish that take center stage in many of these paintings. Beautiful and often richly hued, these equally tragic piscine trophies offer us a glimpse of man's primal nature as hunter.

The *Beach* series includes another body of work featuring bathers splashing amidst an energetic surf. Since the ocean waters of Northern California are much too cold for prolonged swimming, these paintings derive almost exclusively from Crossman's imagination. As with the fisherman paintings, it is primarily the formal characteristics of these scenes rather than the scenes themselves that Crossman is attracted to: "painting a moving figure in this wet environment pushes it into abstraction," Crossman explains, "I like working on that thin line between reality and abstraction, and finding gestures in paint." Crossman never starts with a formal study lest it stifle the spontaneity she seeks in her paintings. With intuition as her primary guide, the compositions tend to shift greatly during the painting process. Bodies, for example, will often flip around as she paints. Though she might initially conceive of a form as a back, it later turns into a leg, or perhaps a face as she works. She refrains from editing herself in order to more closely approach her goal of capturing "an unedited glimpse into the human condition."

Crossman's newest series, *Pacifica*, is devoid of any human presence—a bold move for a painter whose principal works over the last decade have been tied to or contingent upon the kinetic energy of the body. But Crossman is a diverse painter (she cites, for example, de Kooning, Diebenkorn, Park, Richter, Hockney, Rothenberg, and others as

influences) and does not let herself get boxed into a certain manner of expression or subject matter. Though the *Pacifica* paintings limn the open expanse of ocean and atmosphere, Crossman thinks about them less as landscapes than as explorations of “the tension of the horizon, light, and weather in an abstract context.” In an essay accompanying a 2012 catalog of Crossman’s recent work, DeWitt Cheng writes:

The *Pacifica* series eschews figures, concentrating on expanses of ocean bounded by the horizon above and the surf below; they’re quieter and more abstract than her figurative works, which exalt and exult in motion and energy; painted from memory, ‘meditative and minimal,’ they’re about the experience of living at water’s edge, with the rolling waves employed, not as symbols of man’s fate (as in Turner, Homer and Ryder), but metaphysically, as the visible increments of time’s passage (as in Friedrich).

Marshall Crossman was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1951. She earned her BFA in 1973 from Colorado State University. Her work can be found in private and public collections across the work. This will be Crossman’s fifth solo show at Dolby Chadwick Gallery.