



**NICOLA  
VASSELL**

Independent  
New York  
2023

Elizabeth Schwaiger



## **Nicola Vassell Gallery Presents: Elizabeth Schwaiger at Independent New York**

**Independent New York | Spring Studios**

**On View May 11 – 17, 2023**

**Opening May 11, 10AM – 8PM**



Elizabeth Schwaiger, *Solipsism*, 2023, watercolor, acrylic, and oil on canvas, 54 x 72 in.

Nicola Vassell is pleased to present Elizabeth Schwaiger at Independent, New York. In this new body of work, Elizabeth Schwaiger reflects on her experience at the Robert Rauschenberg Residency in Captiva, Florida and the subsequent impact of Hurricane Ian on the Foundation in 2022.

Captiva is an island constantly in peril due to its low-lying elevation and rising sea levels. While there in 2019, Schwaiger communed with the land and legacy of Rauschenberg's studio. When it rained, the campus' lawns were easily waterlogged and lay sodden. She imagined the damage that a hurricane might cause, almost prophetically, and became preoccupied with both its material and immaterial impacts. More broadly, Schwaiger considers the increasing number of natural disasters taking place across the globe and the existential threat that extreme weather poses to humankind and ecosystems.

In so doing, Schwaiger paints with urgency and addresses natural catastrophes through the prism of the uncanny, or "unheimlich" in German. This term, etymologically deriving from "unhomely", was theorized by Freud as the revelation of what is private and concealed. In Schwaiger's view, humans try to obscure pressing threats such as ecological disasters, which lurk then act violently upon us.

Her paintings are multi-layered both technically and metaphorically. She superimposes watercolor, acrylic and oil to create complex fragmented spaces, where reflections on windows blur the lines between safe, domestic interiors and nature breaking through—outside being, at once, endangered, powerful and threatening. In her new works, Schwaiger uses rich blues and fiery oranges inspired by the palette of the deep sea.

Working mostly from memory and images, Schwaiger challenges reality, introduces *mise en abyme*, the positing of artwork within artworks, painting with her own vocabulary and developing alternate, dreamlike interiors, in which entropy presides, fire burns and time slips.

For Schwaiger, to examine tangible contemporary themes like environmental anxiety is also an interesting way to introduce more philosophical questions like solipsism. In a large work of the same title, she questions society's tendency to use internalized rule sets for its own behavior, which can engender a lack of consideration for other life forms.

"There is hope though," Schwaiger says. With her paintings, she aims to plant a potent seed about coexistence on our planet.