

JEANNIE MOTHERWELL: NEW WORK

Lyman-Eyer Gallery
432 Commercial Street
Provincetown

July 22 through August 3

For Robert Motherwell, the father, home meant moving closer to the waters of Provincetown from a captain's house across Commercial Street to a house and studio complex dead on the beach and then, slowly but surely, to international issues and stature.

Painting in the same light and air, distanced by memory, Robert's daughter Jeannie Motherwell is tracing her own route home.

Growing up a Motherwell was a little daunting for Jeannie, as it was for other children of artistic and literary strivers playing on the Provincetown beaches. Her father and stepmom Helen Frankenthaler taped her childish art to the refrigerator, even framing some their critical eyes deemed worthy of higher notice.

But at some moment in growing up and out, Jeannie's ingenuous appreciation of Robert and Helen's praise was complicated by a growing recognition of just who they were when they stepped out of their parental roles.

Helen Frankenthaler was challenging the frontier of the painter's canvas with a technique, at once lyrical and radical, of sinking her exuberant colors into unsized linen, allowing the staining hues to seek their own way with gentle, expert guidance. Robert Motherwell was pushing the boundaries of abstraction with non-figurative odes to matters of large import. His "Elegy to the Spanish Republic" series expressed the yearning of a whole generation for Western political freedoms lost to a tragic civil war.

But if the refrigerator door now appeared a less auspicious stage, Jeannie Motherwell pursued her artistic strivings at Bard College on the banks of the Hudson River. And then, a few years out of college, back in that complex of studios and home on the Atlantic, she discovered that Provincetown was a much smaller and also a much larger place — for living and for aspiring.

It was, perhaps, the first time a Motherwell spent successive winters in that spartan Portuguese fishing community on the tip of Cape Cod. During that period, Jeannie felt herself closing the gap between the summer people and those who earned a living on the sea. When the "Patricia Marie" fishing vessel went down with a loss of all the crew in 1977, it was not only a generational tragedy for its villagers, but a real and deep emotional moment for her.

In a series of paintings Motherwell dates from that event, boats rock precariously or sail serenely between sea and sky. They no longer hold the untroubled blue of her childhood ocean, nor the ever-benevolent sun; there was joy, but also danger; stability but also tension.

"Moveable Blue" has no recognizable boat and the bit of sun is off in the right corner, threateningly cool or barely warm, depending on how you see it. The "blue" itself loops from multiple centers of gravity, a balancing act



Blue Streak, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 20 x 10".

that could be sky, or sea, or both.

"Blue Streak" is, to this viewer, also located in a rich ambiguity. It could be a river viewed from above flowing peaceably between verdant banks, or it could be a waterfall whooshing over a precipice flanked by greenery dripping from bare rock cliffs. Up closer, the view see-saws from static to dynamic, arresting smudges to the most slippery of slopes.

"Orion's Belt" speaks of Jeannie's latest fascination with a book of photographs from the Hubble Telescope. Stellar gases gallop across a horizontal format in leaps of thinning blue acrylic or wobble in pustules and filaments of contained power — acid green, bilious yellow.

How far from the fabled weather and tides of Provincetown has Jeannie Motherwell roamed to be "at home" with her own generation and vision? See for yourself when her 20-odd abstractions go on view in late July at Provincetown's Lyman-Eyer Gallery.

| **James Foritano**