

## CAROLA CLIFT: RESONANCE AND REVERBERATION

WILLIAM SIEGAL GALLERY

540 SOUTH GUADALUPE STREET, SANTA FE

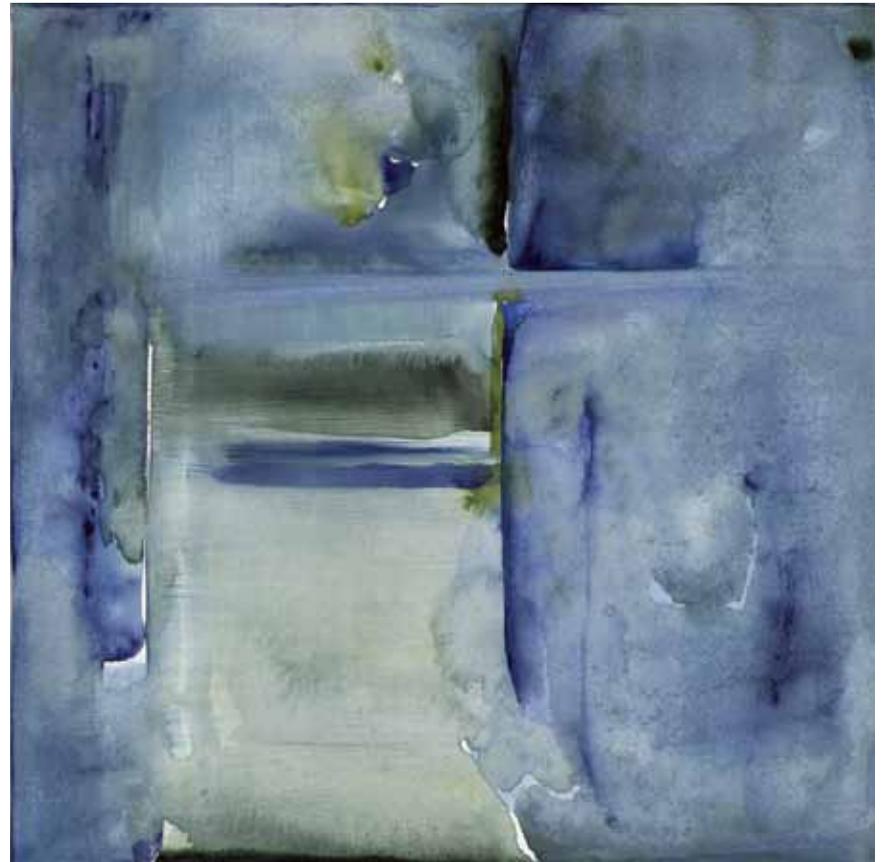
**Carola Clift** recently told me that art, like music, is “not an approximation; it’s specific, honest, and may be different every time, but every time, every nuance counts.” This emphasis on intentionality is compelling, given *Resonance and Reverberation*, Clift’s exhibition of highly intuitive and spontaneous watercolors and photographs on display at William Siegal Gallery. A Santa Fe native (her father is the highly regarded photographer William Clift), Clift was encouraged by her family to indulge her creative predilections and she began her artistic career as a gifted pianist. Clift has long been fascinated with the correlation between the visual and musical arts. Likening her method to that of a musician, she notes how music can reach deep inside a “listener” to coax out some unknown or unexplored content.

The photographs in the *Glimpses* series initially look like blurred landscapes, but we soon see that beyond the rushed foreground is a background of striking beauty and stillness. It becomes evident that these images were taken from the inside of a moving vehicle, invoking a headiness that is at once familiar and voyeuristic. The act of watching the world go by from within a car, with your mind and eyes wandering over bleak and brilliant landscapes, is enhanced by the viewfinder’s ability to capture the intoxication of action itself. A voyage by car is a fantastic theme because of its intimations of dynamism and adventure as well as its ability to suggest the ubiquitous American dreams of expansion and potentiality, themes which make Clift’s images familiar yet uniquely exhilarating. The inevitable monotony of a car trip is acutely rendered in *Glimpse No. 7*. Under a dreary sky we feel the exhaustion of the driver, the monotony of the road, and above all the implacable poignancy of a nameless place in which we have no intention of stopping. The series

in this way encourages us to contemplate the innumerable places and things that generally exist in a contemplation-less state. This creates an intriguing if ambiguous dialogue; Clift has crafted scenes that invite deeply personal reflection.

That strangely cozy feeling of driving through the rain on an unknown highway is perfectly captured in *Glimpse No. 2*. From under a concrete overpass, the viewer is safe from blurry headlights and oncoming semis. The advancing and retreating swish of windshield wipers is almost audible, and the smell of wet cement so recognizable that a puzzlingly familiar sense of time and space emerges. Clift’s vision for this photographic series was built on the concept of fleeting, momentary capture: “There was no turning around and driving past there again... I was either there, participating, or I missed it.”

Across from the photographs are a series of watercolors,



Carola Clift, *29 November*, watercolor on board, 10½" x 10½", 1999

and Clift says she immerses herself in the act of their creation; for her, “there is no going back and re-doing, re-thinking, modifying. They are like live performances.” Various rendered in pale blues or murky browns, they are enigmatic in nature, with strokes and stains of pigment in similar color groupings. Meant to evoke thought-form and memory, and challenging immediate definition, they are clearly made by the same inquisitive and energetic mind that took pictures from inside a moving vehicle. The watercolors are titled as diary pages might be, and indeed their introspective nature supports Clift’s statement that they are deeply personal explorations. The artist asserts that she created each painting late at night, in one sitting, as an exercise in forging a “correspondence between what is inside of me and what is outside.” In *November 29*, Clift covers a small square board with marked-off segments of saturated blues interspersed with hints of green. Clift isn’t working with a large area, but by overlapping and subtly dividing her canvas into windowpane-like gridded areas, she creates a compositional intrigue that is consistent throughout the series. Perhaps this is why these journal entry-style watercolors have more in common with the photographs than initially meets the eye. These watercolors are like visual concertos, supporting the emphatic quality of spontaneity that runs throughout her photographs.

William Siegal Gallery, with its seamless melding of ancient and contemporary art, makes a lovely setting for this graceful exhibition. Clift’s earnest confidence in her intuition never detracts from her rigorous artistic approach, and her ability to capture the essential elusiveness of sensory experience is forceful and convincing. Clift’s ability to freeze the un-freezable is deftly realized; in doing so she reminds her audience that even the briefest interaction with something beautiful has the potential to become a lasting part of us.

—IRIS MCLISTER



Carola Clift, *Glimpse No. 2*, archival digital print, 22" x 30", 2007