An abstract painting with a complex composition. The left side is dominated by vibrant teal and turquoise brushstrokes, some with dark spots. A thick, dark black diagonal stroke runs from the top left towards the center. The right side features a mix of pink, red, and white, with some darker, almost black, areas. The overall texture is very expressive, with visible brushwork and a sense of movement.

# B r e a k i n g P o i n t

*Alyssa Monks' recent exhibition at Forum Gallery highlights the development of her artwork.*

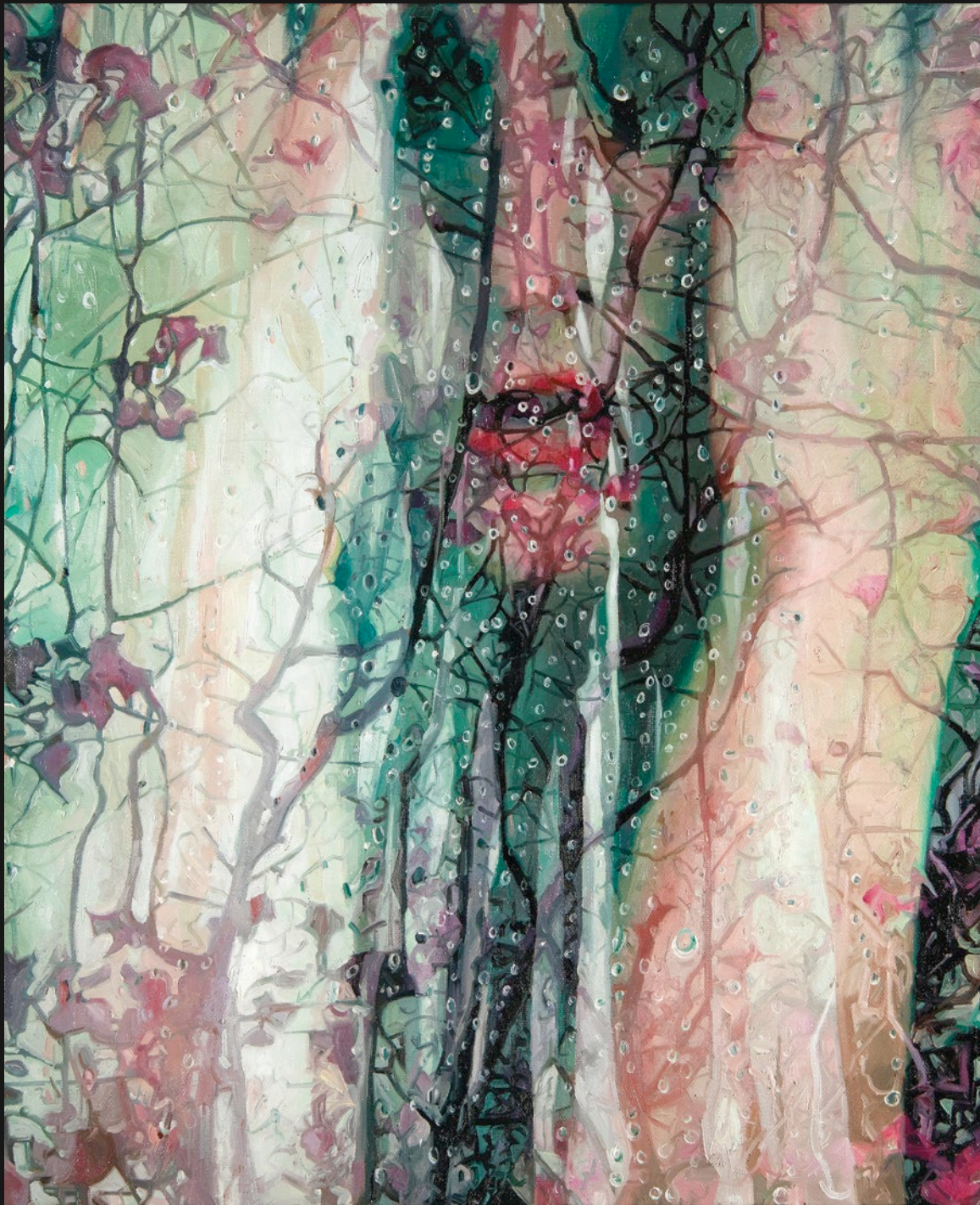
BY JOHN O HERN





*Trance, oil on panel, 12 x 18"*









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**A**lyssa Monks says, “I strive to create a moment in a painting where the viewer can see or feel themselves, identify with the subject, even be the subject, connect with it as though it is about them, personally.

Her paintings around 2005 were highly rendered. She says, “When I began painting the human body, I was obsessed with it and needed to create as much realism as possible. I chased realism until it began to unravel and deconstruct itself. I am exploring the possibility and potential where representational painting and abstraction meet—if both can coexist in the same moment.

Her most recognized paintings are figures in the small confines of a shower seen through water and steam coated glass, immersed in a moment of privacy and intimacy with cleansing and revivifying water. The distortions of water and glass push the images toward abstraction.

The death of her mother from cancer five years ago jolted her sense of security but opened

her to a feeling for the beauty in all of life from the sensuous shower to the awfulness of dying.

She began to paint the landscape, letting the paint express itself, free of her conscious control. An expansive space evolved in that creative process. She later returned to the figure and allowed it to be part of the expansiveness. Her figures now are shown in a moment as her early figures were, secure as they were, but now full of infinite possibility.

She says, “My intention is to transfer the intimacy and vulnerability of my human experience into a painted surface. I like mine to be as intimate as possible, each brushstroke like a fossil, recording every gesture and decision.

Her latest work was recently shown in the exhibition *Breaking Point* at Forum Gallery in New York. She has refined her idea of the moment as the time “between feelings or expressions. Some emotion or experience is just starting to hit the subject or just about to leave.

Her discovery of the qualities of paint and





Scan for  
VIDEO

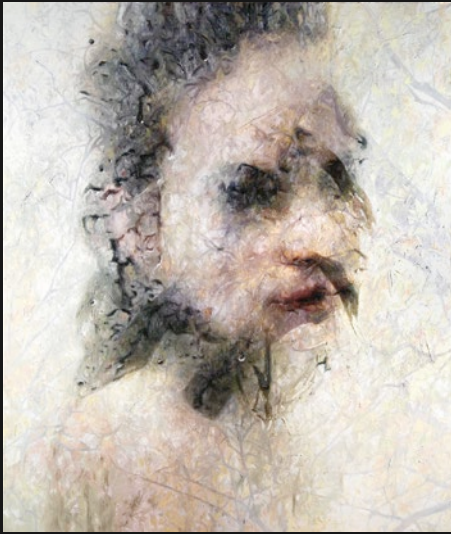
3  
*Kali*, oil on linen,  
58 x 36"

4  
*Unfold*, oil on linen,  
66 x 56"

5  
*Mirad*, oil on linen,  
30 x 30"

6  
Alyssa Monks in her  
studio.

All images  
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Courtesy Forum  
Gallery, New York.



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surface have merged with her ability to make her figures real, creating images in which figure, ground, space and the natural world blend together as an elemental unity. Her women are realizing their strength, ready to break through society's constraints.

In her painting *Kali*, the figure emerges from the richly expressive paint as a force of nature, representing the Hindu mother goddess—destroyer and creator.

The vines in *Tangled* and other paint

ings suggest entanglement and vulnerability on one hand but also appear to be veins and arteries supplying nourishment and carrying away waste, making the woman's body strong. She is getting ready to break free.

Monks makes realism and abstraction coexist in one moment just as strength and weakness do, power and vulnerability, beauty and ugliness. The observer can only see one at a time, but the subject is both. Monks' abstraction reveals a deeper reality.

Robert Fishko, director of Forum Gallery, writes, "In this body of work, Alyssa Monks touches the innermost nerves of her of her subjects and of the viewer as well, with works that engage, confront and compel in bold synchrony. The subjects are women, individuals but social beings, suffused, as is the artist, with boundless energy and limitless passion, always aware of the attention they command yet knowing that their sacred, personal spaces must remain so. ●