

PAUL THIEBAUD GALLERY

John Santoro *Mud Time and the Sprites of Spring*

September 13 – November 8, 2025

Opening reception: Saturday, September 13th, 3–5pm

Artist talk: 3:30pm

Paul Thiebaud Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Mud Time and the Sprites of Spring*, an exhibition of new paintings by Chicago based artist John Santoro, on Saturday, September 13, 2025 with a reception from 3-5pm and an artist talk at 3:30pm. On view will be twelve new oil paintings depicting abstracted landscapes in Santoro's rigorous and evocative brushstrokes. Thickly painted wet on wet, Santoro's impastoed canvases capture the movement and drama of extreme weather as it plays out in the world around us. The exhibition will be on view through November 8, 2025.

Inspired by the seasonal changes brought about by the arrival of Spring, billowing clouds, and wind whipping storms of his native Chicago, John Santoro interprets these phenomena through the language of gestural abstraction. In works such as *Mud Time and the Sand Sprite*, *Blue Bird*, *Aqua Coast and the Beach Sprite*, *The Sprites of Spring*, and *Mr. Mud Time*, broad strokes of blue mixed with white sweep across each composition, forming dynamic atmospheres over shorelines of green, brown, red, and yellow. In others, like *Turner Sea Storm*, *Sandy Rollers*, and *Penelope, the Sea Sprite*, Santoro's frenetic, all-over paint handling conveys the torrential forces unleashed by massive weather events.

Santoro's inspiration for this series of paintings has several sources. In 2021, Santoro encountered Joan Mitchell's *Mud Time* in the artist's retrospective at SFMOMA and instantly fell in love with the painting. Mitchell sourced her title from the 1934 Robert Frost poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time", which is about the tension between the love for work and the need for gain in human existence. The *Sprites* were inspired by Roy De Forest's painting *Muttly and the Wood Sprite*, which Santoro saw in the late 1980s. In the lower portion of the painting, De Forest painting a menacing, but friendly looking green character, or "Sprite". This painting has stayed with Santoro and he chose to include in his titles as on homage to one his painting heroes.

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In the context of a world where extreme weather events are now a regular occurrence, John Santoro's paintings are both intentionally provocative and challenging. They also, in the artist's words, are "a bit weird, subtly surreal, funny, goofy, and, as with Roy De Forest's example, a tad menacing."

Born in Joliet, Illinois and raised just outside of Chicago, John Santoro earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts at northern Illinois University in 1986 and his Master of Fine Art from the University of Chicago in 1988, from which he also received a graduate fellowship. Santoro was also a three-time recipient of the Community Arts Assistance Program (CAAP) Grant from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and has been a Fullbright Mentor at the Institute of International Education. His works have been exhibited across the United States and can be found in numerous private collections. This is John Santoro's fourth solo exhibition with Paul Thiebaud Gallery.

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