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9th Anniversary Issue

**NINE FOR OUR NINTH:**

**MATT BRACKETT'S DARK WATERS & GRATEFUL  
DAUGHTERS AT CATAMOUNT ARTS**

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# DARK WATERS/GRATEFUL DAUGHTERS

## MATT BRACKETT'S DICHOTOMY

With a poetic and rhythmic title, "Dark Waters/Grateful Daughters" is a wily exhibition that counterpoints two very different groups of paintings, spanning a five-year, highly demanding period in Matt Brackett's life.

"Dark Waters" is a selection from Brackett's "Dark Animals" series

(2009-12), animal-landscape portraits within the realism/naturalism tradition, while "Grateful Daughters" are recent abstracted-tonal, sketch-like unfinished experiments featuring intimate views of flowers in full bloom, originally called "Daughters of Gratitude" (2013-14). The adroit decision to exhibit these

two contrasting modes together was made by curator Katherine French, who recently became Catamount Arts' gallery director after retiring as the executive director of DanforthArt in Framingham, Mass.

In this exhibition, Brackett's brand of animal reality-drama is softened by his boldly colored floral explorations. But, it's important to note that while these flowers are indeed pretty to look at, they are not placid. They are voluminous, attention-grabbing blooms in the process of maturing.

Alternating visually between the two manners provides the viewer with a break away from the monotony of digesting one or the other subject and style as an individual solo group. The combination also adds substantially to understanding the subtly conveyed narrative that Brackett is sharing. What we read by shifting from animal story to declamatory flower is that the artist was juggling moments of extreme transition with feelings of being perpetually on the edge of chaos. This intense and isolating period eventually broke and was transformed by or into passionate life where struggle and possible decay became a deep and heavy joy.

Brackett's paintings, overall, including "Threshold" and other earlier figurative-landscape works, convey a certain old-fashioned manner that is reminiscent, although contemporary and updated, of the formal and trained European academia approach coupled with an American sensibility and physicality. These are highly composed classic forms of expressive-realism with a touch of romanticism. Brackett's work is about structure and organization.

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THROUGH  
MARCH 22

*Infinite Whole*, 2012, oil on canvas on aluminum panel, 60" x 35".





What is most brilliant about this artist is where he's decided to place his object-subjects within the compositional space. The end results of his creative arrangements are narratives that capture moments in time at pivotal points. He's a master at freezing-up uncertainty and forcing the viewer to ponder what will happen next. This approach is challenging and beautifully uncomfortable, telling us something about the artist's sly temperament.

He works as an author, assembling chapters that are meant to be fictional vignettes informed, as is expected, by personal experiences and real places, designed to represent the subject expressively and yet as accurately as possible. His spaces are stages for theatrical scenes. He is pulling out a dialogue about what is true and what is possible, engaging us in the idealism/realism dichotomy.

In "Dark Waters," Brackett's animals have personality, yet they are still animals. Brackett avoids anthropomorphism, and in this way he continues and expands upon the animalier tradition in which the focus is on rendering correct and vigorous depictions of anatomy. Although he is not identified as a "wildlife artist" – this is the first time he's devoted an entire series to animal subjects – he is highly skilled in this genre. Again, there is something old-school about Brackett. With his animal-landscape scenes he masterfully balances the imitare and ritrarre approaches.

Landscape for Brackett is not simply used as background diorama, either; it is an independent voice. These places have their own characters, appearing idyllic on the surface, yet raging quietly, holding a nervous energy that is highly unpredictable.

For those readers/viewers who need to know Brackett's background story, here are the essentials: Brackett is a graduate of Yale University who has received a number of prestigious awards for his fine art work.

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The landscapes and waterscapes depicted in his paintings originate at the source of his ancestral home on the South Shore of Massachusetts. Brackett works from a variety of photographic references and builds up maquettes as reference models for his compositions. "Dark Waters" tells a story of parenthood, illness and identity building from a masculine point of view, while "Grateful Daughters" is directly influenced by his domestic life. Brackett reveals the sensitive details grounding his work on his webpage: [mattbrackett.com](http://mattbrackett.com).

**J. Fatima Martins**