

Emily Van Engel - ARTIST STATEMENT

Living with the ecological instability that I have known my whole life and that gets worse every year is overwhelmingly paralyzing. And simultaneously -- if I let myself truly imagine -- it is healing to envision what our world could look or feel like if we genuinely prioritized the health of our environment. Spending less time in daily commutes and more time outside would feel bright, creative, and invigorating. The freedom I feel in each of us owning the full value of our labor would be immense, and the notion of trading fairly to share our gifts to care for ourselves, each other and the earth, would feel liberating and supportive. The idea of housing not being part of a game and instead, the thought of everyone having access to a clean and safe place to live feels soothing. Visualizing indigenous people owning and managing lands based on centuries of ecological knowledge is so vital and a sigh of relief from current land management and ownership practices, that I imagine looking back on our current colonized way as a time of deep anguish. This way that I strive to be -- a transformation from instability to stability -- feels joyful, connected, and beautiful. It is sustainable, and it is strong.

In my paintings, I explore the beginnings of what it might feel like to live in harmony with our environment by giving form to these feelings abstractly with color and shape. The colors in my paintings have specific meanings that resonate with me personally. I attribute a color to how I want to feel about various aspects of living in society: health, democracy, housing, and ecological practices. Together as a palette, the colors reflect the positive and affirming ways I want to feel about living in society, even if how I want to feel doesn't reflect today's realities. I lay in colors in my compositions in ways that conjure joy and satisfaction, as a metaphor for what could be possible when it comes to creating a society and environment that is healthy, clean and safe for all. Additionally, I incorporate shapes that symbolize threads, braids and weavings as a nod to the idea that we can be stronger and more stable when we intertwine diverse ideas. When woven together, the threads serve as a metaphor for the ways that environment, health, racial justice, housing, and democracy intersect and strengthen together. My abstract explorations serve as a bridge for what it could feel like to support each other to reshape how we engage socially and environmentally.