

# A WOMEN'S THING

## Angelina Gualdoni: The alchemist of modern painting

by The AWI Editors June 20, 2024



Angelina Gualdoni, born in San Francisco and now living and working in New York City, explores the relationship between visibility and the unseen. Gualdoni's work uses techniques such as pouring, staining, and textile patterning to explore themes of women's creative practices varying from the industrial to the domestic and from the decorative to the metaphysical. Gualdoni's paintings are known for their expansive washes of color and layered textures, which create a dynamic interplay between the surface and the underlying elements.

In her recent works, showcased at Asya Geisberg Gallery's ["Future Fair"](#) booth, Gualdoni presented "The Fourth Key" and "Ecotone," which originate from her fascination with the alchemical axiom "as above, so below." Through these works, Gualdoni addresses ecological themes and the transformation inherent in alchemical processes, aiming to connect ambivalence and action through the cultivation of empathetic imagination. We recently spoke with Gualdoni about alchemical exploration, her partnership with the Asya Geisberg Gallery, and the work she showcased at "Future Fair" this year.



Angelina Gualdoni,  
The Fourth Key, 2024.  
Oil and acrylic on canvas,  
42h x 53w in,  
106.68h x 134.62w cm.



Angelina Gualdoni,  
Ecotone, 2024.  
Oil and acrylic on canvas,  
47h x 50w in,  
119.38h x 127w cm.

**Tell us a little about your works, which we could see at Asya Geisberg Gallery’s “Future Fair” booth this year.**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** I made two paintings for “Future Fair”—one called “The Fourth Key,” and one called “Ecotone.”

These paintings developed out of my interest in the alchemical axiom “as above, so below.” I’ve been using this premise to explore doubling and mirroring elements of the visible landscape with substrates underground: decomposition in humus, accumulated layers of debris, and geologic formations.

In alchemy, the objective of transformation is also doubled: as one works on transforming a substance, you are also transforming yourself. Using this as a framework for dealing with ecologically minded subject matter is one of my ways of processing climate change, as well as working with ideas of regeneration and adaptation while staying with emotions like anxiety, reverence, decay, hope, and loss. My hope is to decrease the space between ambivalence and action through cultivating empathetic imaginations.

“The Fourth Key” is a coded phrase used to describe the fourth step in the alchemical process: dissolution. This painting has a few shapes anchoring it; a lateral oak leaf, (the ridges suggest glaciers above land), and waveforms under and above it. Waves are harbingers of changes, and the oak leaf itself is desiccating and separating, full of holes. The visual temperature above ground is cool, the underground is hot. I enjoy this tension of mirroring, but with the discrepancy in temperature, which is made slightly more uncomfortable by the fact of a few eyes in this landscape gazing back at you.

“Ecotone” refers to a transition area between two biological communities, where they meet and integrate. This painting plays around in mucky earthy midtones, where hills slide into each other, gullies form, and change might take place. I often try to convey landscapes where things are in decline and coming around again at that same time.

**What was your favorite booth to visit, or who was your favorite artist this year at “Future Fair,” and why?**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** There were two standouts for me: Klea McKenna at EUQINOM Gallery and Beck Lowry at Elijah Wheat Showroom. Klea showed painted photo prints that were absolutely gorgeous to look at and utterly mystifying as to how they were made. The shape vocabulary comes from die-cut packaging, so it’s mechanical and geometric, but the way that she positions and frames the shapes suggests female body parts. The shapes are stamped and pressed, but the pieces are practically caressed with light and color. In addition, her large-scale intaglio print was stunning, reminding me of Dada artist’s uses of mechanical imagery, as well as the richness that artists can get with prints. I want to see more! EWS’s booth with Beck Lowry’s work also blew me away. These pieces are such labors of love; the sculpted armatures feel devotional, and yet she maintains a sense of freedom and play with her weaving and painting, so they don’t feel overworked; they just feel lived in like homes, where things accrue over time.

**You've been working with Asya Geisberg Gallery for many years. You closed your fifth solo exhibition, "Verso della Terra," earlier this year. Over time, how has your partnership with the gallery influenced your work?**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** I so appreciate being at a gallery with someone who has walked a similar path. Asya was an artist before becoming a gallerist, we both are ambitious, and we both have children, so there is a baseline understanding of the demands, desires and dynamics at play in our lives—we have a lot of shared ground and mutual respect. And, Asya gets me and my work in a deep way, she can immediately see and get excited about a lot of the same paint tricks that I do ... but perhaps most meaningfully, Asya has seen me through a number of phases in my work, and knowing that she would be open to whatever comes next has been an incredible support. Loyalty is such a rare trait, and having a gallerist who gets that the artist's path is not always linear has been a real gift, for which I am very thankful.

**In your recent paintings, you delve into the rhizosphere and mycelium as metaphors for interconnectedness. What inspired you to explore these underground networks, and how do they relate to your broader artistic vision?**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** The rhizosphere has to resonate with anyone raised in religions with resurrection stories—this is where humus, fed by the decomposition of leaves and other organic material, works as the nutritional life force for anything with roots, anything growing out of the ground. One soil scientist called this the one place on earth where death turns to life—that's a powerful idea!

I came to all this through a practice of foraging. I know it sounds cliché now because everyone is talking about mycelial networks, but this was an evolution of the information I was learning when I started collecting mushrooms in 2015. Shout out to the [New York Mycological Society](#), which is a great place to start if anyone is interested.

Oftentimes, when you're looking for certain mushrooms, you're learning their habitats—the trees they like to be near, the types of soil, the direction of the hill, and you're looking at plants to see if it's the right time of year to find that mushroom you're looking for. And, the mushrooms, they're not always there—or at least, I don't always see them. So, when there are no mushrooms to be seen, I'm looking at plants. This underscored to me how little I knew about all the plants around me—in forests, but also in parks and in the cracks of sidewalks in New York City. I started to learn how to identify these plants, their historical medicinal uses, and preferred environments. It became increasingly clear to me how soil, plant, and human health are inextricable from ecological health.

This realization of the importance of the largely unconsidered ground beneath our feet dovetailed nicely with one of my major ongoing preoccupations: how humans ascribe meaning to unseen forces (entropy, natural disasters, climate change, late-stage capitalism, etc.). The lack of a single unified "why is this happening?" (climate change, fate, science, divine will, conspiracy, chance, etc.), the murkiness and plurality of meaning—these feel very at home in the underground, which is incredibly permeable, lacks borders, and houses all kinds of support systems we don't think about regularly—some of which are collaborative and some corrosive—which is also a lovely metaphor for the subconscious. And painting holds all these truths and fictions and desires equally well, which is one of the things I love about it.

**Pouring, staining, and pushing paint through from the back of the canvas—can you share more about the technical process of your work?**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** My paintings begin on raw canvas. I use acrylic paint stains to create textures, shapes, and lines and set certain moods with color. In the past five years, I've been utilizing the bleeds that these first maneuvers create on the verso side of the canvas as the face of the final work. So, in many paintings, there comes a time when I have to remove the canvas from the stretcher, flip the back to be the front, and restretch it. Then, I begin again, articulating landscape elements with washes of color, pattern, and line. It's a laborious process, but I love the way that this incorporates an invisible history into the surface of the painting. There are ghosts there that you can sense but do not always understand what you are seeing.

**What are you working on next?**

**Angelina Gualdoni:** I am using the summer to explore more small paintings on paper—it's an incredibly different surface, smooth instead of textured, white instead of buff, and tracks gestures in a way that is thrilling to me. I want to continue to think about the shape of the underground as a mirror and the objects we dispose of and store there. These paintings will be the basis of my next body of work.



Asya Geisberg Gallery,  
Future Fair 2024.  
Photo courtesy of the gallery.

*Featured image: Angelina Gualdoni. Photo by Frankie Alduino.*

By The AWT Editors

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