

Emptiness, say the Buddhists, has nothing to do with nothingness. Emptiness is not the existential void; nor is it a sense of alienation leading to flat affect, altered sleep patterns, or reduced sexual interest.

Rather, emptiness is the philosophy that all things are empty of a separate self. All things are made up of all other things. So a ceramic bowl may appear “empty,” but it was made from earth and water, shaped by an artisan, fired by fire, and sold by a shopkeeper; it sits on a table now, reflecting the sunlight and cradling the air inside it. Independently of any of these elements, the bowl cannot exist in its current form. Therefore, the bowl is not empty, but full of the universe. As Avalokiteshvara famously states in the Heart Sutra, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.”

This philosophy extends even to us humans. Who you are at this moment arises from an infinity of factors—your physical body, emotions, thoughts, perceptions—many of which will change by the time the next moment rolls around. Independent of these factors, there is no separate self. True realization of this is an experience of enlightenment.

Carol Anthony’s paintings seem born from this understanding of emptiness. Vessels without fruit and rooms with no people exude a sense of *being*, as a strange glow imbues objects and landscapes with a non-corporeal presence. A communion table waits in expectation, bathed by light from a small window. In an otherwise dark room, a skylight floods one of a pair of twin beds. The latter piece is likely a reference to the artist’s late twin sister, who no doubt has presence even in her absence. Thus, the paradoxical title of the show is not a paradox at all—in Anthony’s work, what’s not there is just as palpable as what is there, yet it remains mysterious, unknown.

These atmospheric paintings of rooms, the titles of which begin with “Inner Room,” are windows onto the soul. *Inner Room: Autumn Sunset* merges outer and inner landscapes. An interior space is defined by vigas above and checkerboard tile below, yet the tile becomes an illuminated pathway to the sunset while ghostly trees mark the border, the membrane, between inside and out. Light is a gesture drawing the eye through the piece, here and in other works that depict the metaphorical journey of the soul as pathways curving through stretches of New Mexican fields at sunset.

Elsewhere, lone piñons are backlit with the last brilliance of the fading light, recurring like Monet’s haystacks in autumn and winter, mist and sunset. Anthony’s meditation on light updates Impressionism, though with a different technique: on panel or paper, she applies several layers of oil crayon and blends them in swirls with her fingertips, creating a waxy surface that she works until it’s gritty with scratches and fingerprints. Her surface becomes the smudged window glass of memory, the scratched negative of a photograph. With her muted but luminous palette, Impressionism gives way to the emotive and gestural qualities of Expressionism. These paintings are less about place than about the emotion of place.

Anthony’s still lifes also pay homage to art history, though her cropping of the subject is unusually intimate, with objects such as *Very Large Pear* and *Very Large Egg in Nest* filling the frame. The latter is a colossal, almost planetary egg in a scribbled nest, with an eerie radiance behind it—a mutant child of the atomic age, or the second coming of the dinosaurs? Think *Very Large Array*.

In contrast to her empty rooms is Anthony’s celebration of the fullness, even lusciousness of ripe fruit, which betrays more longing and desire than the Buddhists would admit to. *One Great Watermelon Slice* has been bitten into, suggesting that the show’s produce aisle

of pears, tomatoes, apples, and grapes are also ripe for the biting. These womanly shapes have an orange fire in their bellies. Against dark backgrounds, they shine almost as light sources in themselves, engaging not just sight, but all our senses.

A Carol Anthony piece on a living room wall would reveal itself slowly over time, sometimes coming alive, vibrating, in the way that a Rothko does—even if Rothko took as his inspiration the nihilistic definition of emptiness. Anthony’s work embraces a more inclusive sense of being, inviting us to listen with awareness until we feel the presence in the present.



Inner Room: Autumn Sunset, oil crayon on panel, 17 1/2" x 18", 2007