

**HEATHER STIVISON**  
*Seeds of Change: Paintings of  
Climate Change and Hope*

**Essay by Kathy Imlay**

*I see the earth as a living thing, with the ocean  
as its beating heart, the trees as the lungs, and  
the sky its breath.* – Heather Stivison

I have known Heather Stivison for many years in her role as a museum professional, lecturer and author. What a pleasure it has been to watch her make the circle complete in her masterful return to creating art. And what an honor to write this essay about her first New York solo exhibition *Seeds of Change: Paintings of Climate Change and Hope*.

Using the language of color, light and form, Heather Stivison explores a more holistic vision of the world. Her work crosses boundaries between disciplines, in particular between her life-long passions for art and science. The daughter of a scientist as well as the mother of a scientist, it is at the nexus of these fields that she has set her stake in the future—that of promoting harmony between humans and the natural world. Literature is an ever-present source material—everything from Emily Dickinson and Dylan Thomas to Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos*, Robert Macfarlane’s *Underland*, and Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* inform “Seeds of Change.”

Stivison’s pictorial worlds teem with life and the beginnings of life... pods, seedlings, whirlybirds from maple trees, DNA strands, dandelion puffs dispersing, a bee, are interspersed with all manner of mark-making, including circles made of hatch-marks, wandering lines, spirals, and other symbols that refer to the artist’s long-time interest in

prehistoric rock art and the magical thinking these early expressions of humanity may represent.

Stivison’s paintings have a luminous glow—accomplished by the artist building up layer upon layer of viscous paint, which she pours, smears, scrapes and otherwise manipulates to create fields of color that conjure the watery depths of the ocean or intergalactic space, depending on the palette. Within these spaces her ethereal forms, delicately outlined in white, blues, purples and gold, give off light as they float through the veiled layers of color. There is a sense that you can reach right into the paintings.

The overall suggestion is one of movement and growth—always in a state of becoming, invoking the idea of the universe. Angled lines shoot across the canvas, while constellations of dots and tiny circles may refer to molecules, underwater bubbles, or to exploding stars. They read as systems of information, or early forms of language written by the more than human world—that are not only beyond time, but beyond spatial dimension as well.

The magic of the work lies in Stivison’s ability to create worlds that are at once primordial and prescient, while using abstraction to speak to abstract ideas of our place and responsibility within the universe.

Many of the works are small—some thirteen are only 12x12 inches. The larger works get to the heart of the story of “Seeds of Change.” One quadriptych, the *Winter of Our Discontent*, spans fourteen feet across. The 36x36-inch panels begin with fall and winter, and as the images progress, a pregnant female form emerges from her leafy environment, and ends with new life being nurtured in summer. They speak to the intimacy of our relationship with nature, and perhaps a larger cosmic vision of the wisdom of embracing the feminine energy that birthed us all.