

NICHOLAS FOX WEBER

## PROPOS

To be bold and lyrical at the same time is a rare gift. To be totally open to the forces of beauty, and then to capture one's response vigorously--making an art that is creative and entirely original, while doing justice to wonders well beyond oneself--is better yet.

*I screamed, and--lo! --Infinity  
Came down and settled over me;  
And, pressing of the Undefined  
The definition on my mind,  
Held up before my eyes a glass  
Through which my shrinking sight did pass  
Until it seemed I must behold  
Immensity made manifold;  
Whispered me a word whose sound  
Deafened the air for worlds around,  
And brought unmuffled to my ears  
The gossiping of friendly spheres,  
The creaking of the tended sky,  
The ticking of Eternity.*

These lines are by Edna St. Vincent Millay--like Elena Prentice a New England woman who joined the cultural legacy of her home territory with a vision that knew no boundaries. Millay's lines evoke with uncanny fidelity the vision of Prentice's rich, light-infused abstractions: their mixture of light touch and brave, all-encompassing seeing; their balance and harmony alongside their emotional intensity.

"Scream" is a harsh verb, but, like Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elena Prentice screams with joy and wonder. The willingness to face *Infinity* and the *Undefined* is there in the paintings as in the poet's lines; so is the embracing of limitless horizons. *Immensity made manifold* is what Prentice's paintings are all about, with





their interweaving of vigorous short lines, their shifting and shimmering surfaces. The paintings, indeed, whisper, but are strong enough to drown out other noises.

Prentice's art is subtle but not shy, courageous in its willingness to evoke what is spiritual. *The tended sky* : indeed, that wonderful notion of Millay's is analogous to what these engaging paintings represent, a boundary-less corner of eternity that had been made accessible to the fortunate viewer.

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*I saw and heard, and knew at last  
The How and Why of all things, past  
And present, and forevermore.  
The universe, cleft to the core,  
Lay open to my probing sense.*

Millay's all-encompassing openness to what has been, is, and will be, to the splendid flood of experience, again evokes the spirit of Prentice's infinitely rich compositions with their many layers, their simultaneous probing of surface and depth, the energy that infuses every line. Prentice paints as if it is the most natural of human acts, as if it comes to her easily, yet one knows that this *probing* was not easily won, that she has found a vocabulary and a way of putting things together that, even if they descend from Georges Seurat and are distantly aligned to such independent painters as Mark Tobey, belong to a vision that is Prentice's own invention, one that she has cultivated carefully so that the paintings are worlds of their own, complete and satisfying.







Later in her long poem *Renascence*, from which the lines above have been taken, Edna St. Vincent Millay longs

*To kiss the fingers of the rain,  
To drink into my eyes the shine  
Of every slanting silver line,  
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze  
From drenched and dripping apple-trees.  
For soon the shower will be done,  
And then the broad base of the sun  
Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth  
Until the world with answering mirth  
Shakes joyously, and each round drop  
Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.*

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Raindrops, blades of grass, sunlight reflected in the water: Elena Prentice's paintings are pure and abstract works of art, and at the same time they are paeans to these glories of nature, the spectacular bounty of it all.

How grateful we are to this intrepid woman who sails gracefully from one civilization to another, who now paints away in her studio in Tangiers, for her non-stop willingness to imbibe life's richness and conjure nature's splendors while inventing her own, unprecedented universe. Laughter, mirth, the sense of celebration: these are the forces that infuse the shimmering paintings of Elena Prentice and that make them marvelous worlds that are both bravely revolutionary and wonderfully familiar.