

Catalogue Essay by: Karen Louise Jones
Jane Francis *BACK AND FORTH*
Slide Room Gallery, Victoria, BC

Jane Francis' large-scale abstract paintings capture the essence and energy of plant forms. These are physical paintings for Francis as many of the works are the same size or larger than her. Her process begins by standing in front of her work and visualizing the way plant forms grow in nature; taking the time to imagine how she will express the sensation of the plant growth. Then, using the force of her entire body, and often painting with both hands simultaneously, she begins to make her highly expressive gestural marks.

The confidence and strength conveyed in these latest paintings is evidence that Francis has dedicated the last eight months to drawing and painting her responses to various plant forms. Assiduously working through this single idea, the repetition of her actions has become part of her implicit memory; her body unburdened from focusing on details, allowing Francis to more freely make her visceral marks and connect with the paintings.

There is direct ancestry in Francis' work to the works of gestural abstraction artists such as: Jackson Pollock, Joan Mitchell, Franz Kline, and Helen Frankenthaler. Like Francis, these artists were interested in making art that is instinctual, spontaneous, and dynamic. Francis' expressive, loose brush marks, full engagement of her body in the painting process, and working "in" her paintings firmly root her work in this genre.

Francis' work also contains characteristics of Zen calligraphy, both visually and in the meditative approach to her paintings. However, freed from the confines of factual letter making, Francis is responding to the memory of a shape or a form. The paint from her brush records and conveys each bodily movement, position and pressure. Respecting and acknowledging what has come before, Francis does not conceal previous marks; rather each new layer adds to the complexity of the work.

The paintings are a continuance of earlier drawings and paintings, and while Francis maintains the limited palette of earth tones, black paint is now a dominant medium. In some works the paint is layered and collage is added to build up surfaces that form a relief appearance, giving the work a sculptural quality. The gestural marks are powerful and deliberate, crossing over and through each other to create opaque mappings of the energy of Francis' movements; the velocity of her actions documented. The opacity of the thick marks give way to raw areas of the substrate and delicate washes of earth-toned paint; providing enough tension to offer a sense of depth and emergent life.

While Francis' work began with the idea of natural plant forms, it soon became more about the abstract nature of making marks to represent her responses to the life forces and characteristics of her subject matter. Through her dedication to her idea, and her expressive, gestural brush marks, Francis is capturing the ineffable patterns of growth and life forces.