

## RAPHAËLLE GOETHALS

### LUMENS

LINDA DURHAM CONTEMPORARY ART  
12 LA VEGA, GALISTEO

**travelling into unfamiliar territory** is like turning a kaleidoscope ninety degrees. Suddenly, the colors and pieces of glass find a fresh arrangement. The light shifts and you enter a new landscape in search of the order you know to be there." The words of naturalist Terry Tempest Williams express the visual impact of Raphaëlle Goethals's recent encaustic paintings on exhibit at Linda Durham Contemporary Art. Inspired by her trip to Petra, the ancient Nabataean capital in a remote canyon in the desert of southern Jordan, Goethals's work takes us deep into nascent landscapes of sensuality and wonder. Clearly

the landscape of the Middle East has been internalized: flesh of body responding to flesh of earth. Below the surface of each painting is a familiar, yet buried, territory: a primitive landscape that has coursed through our blood since the beginning of time.

Fecund, earth-toned pigments rich in blacks, browns, warm creams, faded ochres, pinks, dusky greens, blues, and blood reds are suspended in layers of transparent wax like insects in amber. Images arise expressing cycles of birth, growth, decay, and death: cellular structures, venous pathways, worn surfaces of stones, fallen leaves, partially buried bones. Yet floating through this organic world are calligraphic, glyphic, and runic markings. These gestures suggest the embryos of language, the emergence of abstract thought indelibly laminated to the pulse of the earth.

Although these painting are meditative, a generosity of space surrounds the imagery and the markings. There is movement, the dynamic rhythm of life. In *Petra II*, flowing blues are flecked with whites and translucent yellows suggestive of water in a cistern carved into pink sandstone in a land that receives less than six inches of water a year.

Ordered arrangements of white circles lie below the surface in many paintings. Do they symbolize the relentless sun on the desert or are they flickering dots reflected on the shifting sands of our psyches? Could these discs be points of orientation, places of rest, in the internal landscapes we encounter? Or do they compose a grid and, like Goethals's abstract calligraphy, become symbolic of the overlay of culture on the beauty and sensuality of the natural world?



Raphaëlle Goethals, *Petra IV*, encaustic on wood, 78" x 69", 1999

SUSANNA CARLISLE