

*Toward Hydra* (top) and *Matisse Chapel, Vence* (bottom), by Eleanor Ray

art selection and comment by [Lil Copan](#) in the [July 27, 2022](#) issue



(Used by kind permission of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery)

Brooklyn-based and Southwest-informed, Eleanor Ray's paintings are small works of attention—often around six by eight inches, oil on panel. Among her influences is philosopher Simone Weil, who understood attention as prayer.

Ray's work is marked by spareness, depth, clean lines, and a singular view, with all else stripped away. In her exhibitions, the buildings and walls and doorways nearby feel like landscapes, while the dunes, sands, marsh grasses, and water she depicts feel like their own organic architecture. Whether in a painting of a chapel—in this instance the Vence Chapel designed by Matisse—or in formations of color and landmass, her work captures both emptiness and fullness.

With many images, your eye seeks a center point, something to land on. But there is something in Ray's paintings that tamps down that impulse. Bands of color hold a kind of depth. It's as though the heart quietly guides the eye, rather than the other way around—even as something often unexplainable opens up.

"There's a certain satisfaction in painting something," Ray told *Bomb* magazine last year, "and then seeing it more clearly or in a different way."