

A Shock of White

At this time of year, when the ice is disappearing from the ponds and some fields are greening up, patches of snow or ice stay along the edges of shaded roads and in the north corners of fields. They're a shock of white in a spring landscape. Sometimes, if it's a warm day, I think it's a shirt or a piece of paper blown in, stuck against a wall by the wind, but when I get up close, I find the cold remains of winter, clinging.

I have a friend who's an artist. Her studio is upstairs in the old tractor barn on her big farm in Ashfield, Massachusetts, and her canvases, large and small, reveal glimpses of brooks and hillsides, hidden corners and open expanses of this farm, which she and her husband bought 20 years ago from a couple of old bachelors who had lived there, the last of many generations to work that land. When they gave up the farm, the brothers sold everything, not just the farm but the contents of the house, which fairly burst with their belongings, along with the possessions large and small of those who had come before them. Their past clung to them, and when the time came, it was all put up for sale at auction. People still talk about that day, all the old tools and furnishings carried out onto the lawn, sold to the highest bidder and then carted off, vanishing from the farm like ice on a hot day.

Jamie and her husband, Paul, have settled in just as comfortably with their horses (nine of them at last count) and their children (three—grown and moved away now, but a lot of their things have stayed), and their boats and their tractors. They say that if you have a space, it will be filled. They've done the farm justice by using the land as it has been used, filling the barns with animals

and haying the fields for feed for the animals. Jamie can run a tractor as well or better than most men. And when it breaks down, she'll take a crack at fixing it, too.

When she's done with her horses and her children and her haying, she turns to her art. For the past several years, Jamie has been painting what she calls her *Last Snow* series.



Jamie Young's *Onion Field Edge*, 2007, pastel; 5x11.5 inches.

As it gets warmer and warmer, Jamie tells me about discovering these wedges of leftover winter in the corners of her vast fields or along the roads she travels. She's a *plein air* painter—that is, she paints outdoors rather than in her studio. So if she's on her tractor or in her car and she spots these shreds, she hops off and paints—Jamie is always prepared to paint.

She calls me and tells me about this. I tell her I love to come upon these stubborn remnants in my fields, too. Sometimes it's not only spring but almost summer when I find these crescents of snow or ice in the north corner, the furnishings of winter, held dear. 🍷

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