

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Lamont Gallery, Phillips Exeter Academy/
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**LAND AND SEA: PAINTINGS BY CLIFFORD
SMITH; GLASSWORKS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY TALIAFERRO JONES**



Taliaferro Jones, *Sea Form*, kiln cast crystal,
7 1/2 x 2 3/8 x 5 1/4", ©2004.

Clifford Smith's paintings command attention. They depict the sea—sometimes in views of the surf seen from shore, sometimes in sections of choppy swells, perhaps as viewed from the railing of a pitching boat. Unsentimental and frank, they defy the clichés associated with paintings of the sea. The large-scale views of the ocean's surface suggest an observational detachment that engages the viewer in creating meaning. At a distance, the images appear to be photographic, but up close, they are seen to be painterly—not in the impressionist mode, but in dizzyingly blurred edges that require real effort to interpret and in the abstract, rhythmic patterns created by sea and foam. Some of the images never resolve, remaining blurry even from a distance. In *Green to Blue*, the slick paint surface is at odds with the image it creates, a choppy sea blurred by motion. The surface of *August Surf* resolves visually at about 15 feet, but its internal point of focus is some 30 feet into the scene, on a breaking wave. In front of that it remains out of focus, implying a tremendous power in the surge of dark green water with its creamy foam.

Taliaferro Jones's Giclee print photographs celebrate the visual rhythms of nature—blades of grass, waves in sand, grooves in bark. Grouped in vignettes, they remind us of how connected all living things are to one another. *Field*, for example, presents twelve photographs, each concentrating on a particular grass or other meadowland plant, each of which dances its own windblown step. Together the images become contrapuntal, showing the many small motions, seemingly different yet inherently the same, that compound into the larger rhythms of life.

A thoughtful installation by the show's curator, Karen Burgess Smith, reveals the many connections among the bodies of work on view. Jones's photo grouping *Ocean*, with its accompanying larger print *Sea Green*, hung next to Smith's *August Surf*, makes a promising beginning to the dialogue between the two artists. Jones's close-up views of natural forms relate well to the patterns in Smith's ocean surfaces, and each encourages the viewer to appreciate the other. Several of Smith's larger paintings are accompanied by smaller studies on paper, just as Jones's twelve-part arrangements are accompanied by a single image contained therein. These arrangements highlight the formal elements shared by the artists while also suggesting the elemental connections in the nature of *Land and Sea*.

In the center of the gallery are Jones's sculptures, each a single piece of gracefully curved, colored glass that, seen in the context of her photographs, becomes part of the conversation about rhythms and movement. Some only suggest natural forms; others, such as the 7-inch-high *Sea Form*, might well be three-dimensional slices of Clifford Smith's paintings. The connection is made more direct in their surfaces, which are painstakingly incised and surfaced. In the context of this show, they also suggest the soft curves and foggy surfaces of beach glass crafted by the forces of nature. *Robert R. Craven*