

# The New York Times

## Catherine Murphy: 'Recent Work'

By Ken Johnson – 28 March 2013



*In the Grass, 2011*

It has been nearly five years since Catherine Murphy's last New York solo show. This terrific exhibition makes me think that more artists should take time off from the grind of self-marketing.

Ms. Murphy is not an ostentatious painter. She applies her material to canvas and paper with just enough character that we don't forget what her uncannily realistic images are made of.

Their technical understatement is often reflected in the works she creates depicting mundane things, like "In the Grass," a 4-by-6-foot aerial view of a bright green and yellow garden hose lying in tangles on suburban grass, which took three years to finish. Relying mainly on direct observation, she achieves a degree of allover focus that seems slightly more intense than that of everyday perception. She has attended to every blade of grass, it seems, and to the subtly knurled surface of the plastic hose.

It is all so riveting that you may not notice the snake slithering through the grass in the upper left corner. It rhymes sinuously with the hose and it introduces an allegorical element. It's the snake of abstraction in the garden of realism: Jackson Pollock, that is, whose drip paintings are obliquely evoked by the arabesque rhythms of the hose in Ms. Murphy's work.

Such playful confluences of realism, form and narrative animate most of Ms. Murphy's works. Often her plain-spoken way turns poetic. In the painting "Snowflakes," which depicts a paper snowflake taped to a window, we see through the glass and the perforations in the paper to blurry snowflakes falling outside against a night sky. It's transporting.