

ARTnews

Carol May

WALTER WICKISER

Carol May's works are laden with pigment but spare in their forms—a few rocks or trees presented in close-up views that divide the picture rectangle. There's an influence of Asian art, especially in the subject matter, dramatic compositions, and opulent materials. Combining oil and encaustic, May creates deep, translucent surfaces, rich in seductive purples, blues, and greens.

Set against water or a generalized, luminous atmosphere that is equally dense, May's subjects seem caught in the process of emerging, transfixed by bursts of light. Her new paintings emphasize reflections and shadows, repetitions of the trees and branches that reinforce the sense of things coming into being. There's a sort of literalism in *Rain* that suggests its subject by a series of deep, diagonal scratches in layers of wet pig-

ment. Some new works incorporate collage, actually rupturing the paint surface. The abrupt compositional divisions create increased psychological tension.

This sense of urgency lends May's canvases a more personal, Western inflection, incompatible with the contemplative serenity of her Asian influences. One sometimes longs for the restraint and refined observation of natural details characteristic of Eastern brush painting. But in her best works, May forges a compelling synthesis. By making her own expressive impulse seem like a force of nature, she animates and transfigures her poetic subjects.

HEARNE PARDEE

April 1996 ARTnews



Carol May, *River*, 1995,
oil on canvas, 46" x 54".

Walter Wickiser.