

*Opinion:*  
**Dark Paintings**

By Robert Long

Each of the dramatic and messy paintings in Melora Griffis's show at the Pamela Williams Gallery in Amagansett shows a figure, sometimes two figures, sprawled in a field or on a sofa, atop a car, about to drown, or crumpled next to a wrecked car.

It seems likely that the artist has used film stills or photographs as sources for these disturbing pictures, but in much the same manner that Francis Bacon worked from snapshots, newspaper photos, and Velasquez portraits: She has turned the everyday image into something that speaks to us on a deeper level.

It is shocking to see a newspaper photo of a woman who has jumped from a window and landed on the roof of a car. But when the same figure is dramatically foreshortened and painted in thick, broad strokes of green, and on a canvas about six feet high, it is as if we are looking at a descent from the cross: The emotional associations multiply.



“Collapse” is the name Ms. Griffis has given this series of paintings, but it isn't all about death. There are a couple of pictures of men and women kissing, which perhaps qualifies as a kind of emotional collapse, and another canvas, called “Rescue,” shows one figure coming to the aid of a drowning friend — both have smeared, genderless, Baconish faces, which tend to resemble internal organs.



The most powerful of these pictures, however, are the darker ones. A drowned man in a shirt and tie hugs a rocky shore; another man, in a gray suit, its folds and his black shoes elegantly and simply painted, has collapsed in a cheerful field of yellows and pinks, right out of a sunny de Kooning picture of Springs, circa 1964.

Ms. Griffis seems to handle paint with abandon, constructing faces out of many loosely assembled patches of color, throwing in nonspecific daubs of color here and there, leaving the impression that the canvases are somewhat unfinished, but in fact there is nothing casual or unstudied about these memorable paintings.