

ART REVIEW

In 'Neponset River,' layers upon layers

Abstract painter Michael Eder offers a multifaceted perspective on the local waterway

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated April 20, 2022, 4:14 p.m.



Michael Eder, "Neponset River," 2022. Oil on canvas. PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT / PAINTINGS BY MICHAEL EDER

Painter Michael Eder prowls the shores of the Neponset River studying the way the

water moves. His paintings are experiments in the way paint moves.

His abstract works in oil are vitalized by muscular gestures, luminous colors, and space that pulls and thrusts. They conjure the feeling, when swimming, of being dragged under. The textures beg for close looking. Eder pours, dabs, and splatters; paint dries crackling or gritty. These are paintings that must be confronted in person — all that tactility disappears on the screen.

In March, the US Environmental Protection Agency declared a 3.7-mile stretch of the Neponset River from Hyde Park to Dorchester a [Superfund site](#), a consequence of decades of industrial pollution. Federal funds will support study of the pollution and cleanup and restoration efforts. While that's not Eder's focus, he has studied the history, and it feels implicit to his approach.



Michael Eder, "Neponset River," 2022. Oil on canvas. PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT / PAINTINGS BY MICHAEL EDER/PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT

Great, smoggy drafts of black thrash ominously across “Neponset River” as white splashes beneath skeins of blue. Foamy dots fleck the surface. What are those black passages? Shadows? Trash? Toxins made visible?

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Michael Eder, "Neponset," 2022. Oil on canvas. PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT / PAINTINGS BY MICHAEL EDER/PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT

The gestures in "Neponset" are more voluptuous, fleshy curves of blue and pale gray twisting and swaying into one another, like great bubbles rising. Yellow lies beneath, an immanent light. Teal dribbles through the aqueous veils. Eder has thinned the teal

paint, and the color breaks apart. It looks like light shining through algae-spotted water.

Action painters of the mid-20th century made their own expressive language of texture, color, and form. [Jackson Pollock](#) dripped and flung; [Helen Frankenthaler](#) poured. Eder seems to revel in technical experimentation; there's a letting go in his work, but also a strong grip on the tensions that hold everything together.



Michael Eder, "Neponset Wave," 2021. Oil on canvas. PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT / PAINTINGS BY MICHAEL EDER/PHOTO BY WILL HOWCROFT

“Neponset Wave” is perhaps the simplest piece here. The bottom layer is a familiar

rush and swell of blue-green and white. Eder laid the canvas on the floor, poured on top a thinned periwinkle blue, and lifted one end so it flowed, riverlike, downward. It dried with a powdery texture, running with veins. Here and there he dabbed it with a rag, smearing and separating the paint to suggest rising bubbles.

Eder's bold, breathless paintings capture the river's force. It may be toxic in places, they seem to say, but it is defiantly alive.

MICHAEL EDER: NEPONSET RIVER

At HallSpace, 950 Dorchester Ave., through June 11. [hallspace.org](https://www.hallspace.org)

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