

Midbrow

Let It Rain

Pat Steir's paintings lean into the season's encroaching darkness.

By Nora Grace-Flood
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"Winter's Daylight," 2021, by Pat Steir. Photos courtesy of Locks Gallery.

Pat Steir: Before The Rain
Locks Gallery
600 S Washington Square
Philadelphia
Showing Oct. 3 through Nov. 15
Seen Oct. 30, 2025

On display at Locks Gallery this November is not the antidote to seasonal depression, but an effortless articulation of its nature.

"Winter Daylight," one of several abstract paintings by Pat Steir produced post-pandemic and now showing at Locks, reveals the fleeting colors of brumal days through the artist's signature "waterfall" style. Steir, a New Jersey-born artist, rose to



Steir's painting "Like Autumn" (2022–23) rests against a wall in her studio on which she has tried out various colors. Emiliano Granado

prominence during the '70s and '80s as a champion of contemporary art invested in destroying images as symbols and releasing the free expression of paint itself. She is known for her approach of splashing paint on a canvas — and letting it drip into its own figure. This is the 85-year-old's eighth solo show with Locks Gallery.

Most of Steir's work intends to illustrate moments in silent motion; beyond "Winter Daylight" are "Monday Circus" and the show's titular piece, "Before the Rain." Medium is not the pathway to representation in Steir's world. Rather, the medium (oil paint) is both scene and story. The idea of time is innately described through the paint's natural passages.



"Monday Circus" and "Before the Rain."

Take “Winter Daylight.” In this picture, slabby brushstrokes layered one over the other like bricks of time trickle into a messy sludge: Red, rust, turquoise, indigo, cobalt, white and rose merge in that order. It’s a simple interpretation of the streaks of color that come out of quick horizons during cold seasons before settling back into the darkness. The swatches of color — which resemble patches of makeup tested on a naked forearm — are painted upon an off-centered grid of gray. The background is the foil to the fore: Just as the threads of hue show off the passage of time in their dry, cracked states, the canvas is covered in blackened shards of the same texture. Shoelaces of dark paint, divided into neat sixths by thin white lines, appear as overnight rain or fuzzy pixels or a different form of ambient void somehow capable of measurement.

The painting, though technically abstract, reads as a literal study of sunshine in darkness. Steir preserves the balance of light and dark revealed in the daily balance while still communicating the ephemerality of all experiences with color.

As the end of daylight savings approaches, Steir reminds us to lean into what natural light we can capture — without avoiding the encroaching murk.

