

# NICOLE CHESNEY:

## A MEDITATION ON LIGHT AND COLOR

By Sabina Dana Plasse

To experience the latest work of Nicole Chesney is to lose oneself to a dream or somnambulistic state of mind with the longing or craving of beauty and serenity. Her newest exhibition, *Demirror*, which means a state of desire and admire, opens at the Friesen Gallery as a solo exhibition in early August. It is the result of more than a year's dedication to an intense and precise art process that without fail embraces and captures the imagination.

Above: Chesney in her studio.



“Chesney’s paintings are entirely impossible to capture in photography,” says Andria Friesen, Friesen Gallery’s owner. “They can only be experienced to be appreciated. With two Chesneys in my personal collection, I have the joy and privilege of living with her work in addition to representing this career for which my endorsement could not be higher.”

Chesney’s decision-making process and work ethic are both painstakingly precise and directed. However, she is the first to recognize that she cannot overburden her creative method because otherwise she believes she is making a product, not a unique and original piece of art.

“My work has a very distinctive look and approach,” explains Chesney. “I am always vigilant for the difference between a continued investigation of a really distinct idea and repeating oneself. This body of work is perhaps the most exuberant I have ever presented. The title speaks to every painting.”

The art Chesney creates comes from the devotion of her entire being and existence. Her marriage of glass, metal, color, and proportion from every physical angle begs attention and appreciation. Chesney’s process and art ethic is a discipline of many facets from construction and layering of materials to perception of space. Behind every panel Chesney creates, exists an aluminum armature supporting her surface that has been created from layers of oil paint on etched, mirrored glass. She works alone but, on an as-needed basis, will enlist contractors who know how and what she wants as they have been part of her team for 15 years.







Above: *Gleam*, 2018, oil painting on acid-etched and mirrored glass, 30"x 36" x 1". PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



**“The experience of viewing my work in person presents an ephemeral and kinetic relationship between a viewer and the art.”** Nicole Chesney, artist

“My studio is a painter’s studio only where I paint on glass,” she says. “I create between 10 to 15 works a year. Within my work spectrum, there is time committed to commissions and, of course, time for my self-directed art for exhibitions.”

Chesney explains that her commissioned work is a time to engage with a collector. Large-scale

paintings are mostly commissions because architectural scale works are often site-specific.

“I have a collaborative relationship with DuPont for architectural projects in public environments,” says Chesney. “With those pieces, the aesthetic is true to my work, but as objects their fabrication process is fundamentally different than what I

have on exhibition. These works have to survive in a corporate lobby or trafficked public spaces.”

Part scientist and part creator, Chesney’s love for the material she uses is a hint from her past background in sculpture. The material language and the metaphors of her art life, past and present, contribute to all of her pieces, which she considers

Above: *Brim*, “the upper surface of a body of water,” 2018, oil painting on acid-etched and mirrored glass, 30"x 36" x 1".  
Opposite: *Billow*, 2018, oil painting on acid-etched and mirrored glass, 30"x 63" x 1".



integral to her work. Whether it is the influence and her nod to Abstract Expressionism within her art or admired artists including James McNeil Whistler, J.M.W. Turner, or Mark Rothko, Chesney's art is subtle in presentation but ultimately overwhelming in beauty.

"I work on etched mirrors," she reveals. "This work, at its most elemental, is about notions of reflection and introspection, which is conveyed within a visceral perception of landscape, mostly because it is more of a universal experience, not just my own. My mirrors don't reflect an image, and this is a deliberate choice. It's not paramount to me that all of these things come across to a viewer. The experience of viewing my work in person presents an ephemeral and kinetic relationship between a viewer and the art."

There's a balance between all the advance considerations and preparation that informs Chesney's work because of the nature of the materials she uses, which are incredibly unforgiving.

"The way the panels are fabricated, it takes months before that piece of glass is on the wall, and before I can begin to paint on it," she says. "There are many decisions and technical processes that happen even though the work is minimal. The more minimal you want to make something, it becomes exponentially more difficult for every decision to follow."

For *Demirror*, Chesney has searched for wonder, astonishment, and amazement for this body of work. It's a major exhibition for her literally and figuratively because she wanted to present a visually quenching body of work where color is a predominant factor.

"I cannot alter a panel once it is fabricated, but I can alter my approach to color while painting," Chesney reveals. "I have never done this before. It's something very light and lyrical to these particular paintings. I want you to feel like you're diving into something or being enveloped."

Chesney titled the works in *Demirror* without any one particular experience

in mind. These large oil paintings on acid-etched and mirrored glass have titles reflecting a feeling or mood such as *Divum* meaning "sky, open air," *Serenus*, which is "an expanse of calm sea or clear sky," or *Lucet*, which means, "to shine." She does not want an entire life's work of paintings that are untitled, which has led her to her attraction to Latin root words for titles.

"We always use language somehow to identify things that are different from another," says Chesney. "I like to discover interesting words, which conceptually support my work, but they don't initially lead the viewer. It shouldn't matter if you know the title or not. A work of art does not exist without a viewer."

**Nicole Chesney | *Demirror*  
Friesen Gallery, Ketchum**

**Opening Reception  
Friday, August 3  
5-8pm  
Nicole Chesney in attendance for Gallery  
Walk  
friesengallery.com**