

ACUMEN

"Clare Rojas: The Canvas and the Whisper"

By Eve Kaplan

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Clare Rojas, *Setting Sun*, 2025, Oil on linen, 40 x 50 inches (101.6 x 127 cm.)

At 18, Clare Rojas left her hometown of Columbus, her suitcase full of dreams and uncertainties, heading for the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). She returns there today with "Returning," an exhibition opening at the Columbus Museum of Art on September 18. Presenting her work here feels like "a huge welcoming embrace" from the place she left to attend RISD. Yet, beneath the surface of this first major exhibition at home, the essence lies elsewhere: in the silence of the forms and the carefully guarded secrets of the gaze.

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Clare Rojas, *When The Trees Were Fighting*, 2023, Oil on linen, 40 x 50 inches (101.6 x 127 cm.); 41 1/2 x 51 1/2 x 2, 1/8 inches (105.4 x 130.8 x 5.4 cm.) framed

At first glance, Clare Rojas's paintings are striking for the brilliance of their flat areas of color. But on closer inspection, her works are anything but ostentatious. While the nuances are vivid and vibrant, they never shout. Everything unfolds in hushed tones, within the hushed intimacy of the figures that inhabit her canvases: a woman reading, an animal observing surreptitiously, a figure gently merging into the horizon... One finds oneself approaching the painting on tiptoe, almost with a sense of intrusion, as if entering a private dream. Rojas's artistic practice lies at the crossroads of several languages—abstraction, popular imagery, feminism, ecology, spirituality, music, and storytelling—but she reminds us that "*these languages have evolved over time*," explaining: "*By working with different narrative approaches, I invite a diverse audience to engage and feel included.*"

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Clare Rojas, *Ohio Landscape*, 2022, Oil on linen, 7 x 10 inches (17.8 x 25.4 cm.); 8 x 11 x 1 5/8 inches, (20.3 x 27.9 x 4.1 cm.) framed

"'Returning' is just very honest and very real," she says of the exhibition's title. Behind the museum walls, the artist evokes an intimate and emotional landscape. She carefully recalls her early days in Ohio: *"Whether it was the neighbor who gave oil painting lessons in her basement, the math teacher who made sure I passed algebra to keep my scholarship, or all the art teachers who nurtured creativity and freedom through art, I left that place feeling like I could truly become an artist. I had no idea of the scope and wildness that the art world could be."* This exhibition, therefore, possesses the power of a quiet accomplishment: *"It's kind of a moment where I can say, 'Look, I did it!' and my mother is lucky enough to be able to join me for this opening!"*

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Clare Rojas, Important Stone People, 2025, Oil on linen, 56 x 70 inches (142.2 x 177.8 cm.)

Nourished by ecofeminism, the folklore of her Peruvian ancestors, 20th-century abstraction,^{and} surrealism, her work creates invisible bridges between female figures, folkloric narratives, and the whispers of nature. For Rojas, nature remains the only unchanging compass, the source of her creation. When asked about her inspiration today, her answer is immediate: *"The inspiration I find in nature never fails me. It has never wavered or changed, even as the landscape itself has changed. I think what has evolved is the degree of gratitude I feel as I get older for all of it, for its silent beauty as well as its dazzling beauty."* To paint, the artist needs an anchor: *"My landscapes are first and foremost anchored in real places; places I visit, photograph, or remember."* From there, they transform into other spaces.

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Clare Rojas, *the hug*, 2025, Oil on linen, 17 3/4 x 16 inches (45.1 x 40.6 cm.); 18 3/4 x 17 1/8 x 2 3/4 inches (47.6 x 43.5 x 7 cm.) framed

Clare Rojas, *shielded*, 2025, Oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches (127 x 101.6 cm.)

Clare Rojas's great strength lies in her refusal to close off her narratives. She establishes forms, suspends time, and lets us in. Her paintings invite the viewer into an instinctive encounter. Regarding what she expects from visitors, she humbly admits: *"I'm not sure! It's such an interesting question. I suppose interpretation is deeply personal and instinctive. In my work, I share what I see and how I see it, hoping that others will love it as much as I do. And perhaps by sharing that love, a mysterious connection, a kind of bridge, links it all together and connects us to one another."* This openness to interpretation also aligns with the ambition of the exhibition, designed to foster both introspection and a sense of community.

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Clare Rojas, *Blue Bird*, 2025, Oil on linen, 24 x 30 1/8 inches (61 x 76.5 cm.)

Painter, sculptor, installation artist, and musician—she developed a musical practice under the pseudonym Peggy Honeywell—Rojas now seeks to capture the elusive. She says she often thinks about this quote from Miles Davis: *"A painting is music that can be seen, and music is painting that can be heard."* Her current quest boils down to a question of dizzying simplicity: *"How can I achieve this in my work?"*

To this question, "Returning" offers a magnificent beginning of an answer. In the subtle rhythm of its colors and the restraint of its details, Clare Rojas marks a return to her roots that doesn't seek to freeze her artistic journey. It is a gentle, intimate, and profoundly vibrant song.

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Clare Rojas, *Sharks Point*, 2023, Oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches (127 x 101.6 cm.); 51 1/2 x 41 1/2 x 2, 1/8 inches (130.8 x 105.4 x 5.4 cm.) framed

Clare Rojas, *She fell trying to save the songbird stuck in the house, the mosquito drank her blood while she was still warm. She was trying on her old dress up shoes before she donated them.*, 2023, Oil on linen, 30 x 24 inches (76.2 x 61 cm.); 31 1/4 x 25 1/8 x 2, 1/8 inches (79.4 x 63.8 x 5.4 cm.) framed

"Clare Rojas: Returning"

Columbus Museum of Art

480 E Broad Street, Columbus (United States)

From September 18, 2026 to February 7, 2027

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