

## Phyllis Shafer, Caples Lake, oil.



The landscapes of the Sierra Nevada mountain range have proven to be a consistent source of inspiration to artists born in the state and across the country. Phyllis Shafer has contributed many works to this vast tradition, adding her conception of transcendental essence to the varying interpretations of

the region's landscapes. Michaan's Auctions was proud to offer **Phyllis Shafer, Caples Lake, oil** which sold for \$9,100 in our May Gallery Auction, held on Friday, May 17th.

This painting depicts Caples Lake, a small reservoir located thirty miles from South Lake Tahoe, just east

---

**Michaan's Auctions**

2701 Monarch Street, Alameda, CA 94501  
1-800-380-9822 | (510) 740-0220

of the Kirkwood Ski Resort. The lake takes up the middle of the frame, extending towards the upper left corner of the canvas, and is surrounded by rocks in the foreground and left side, with small shrubs in bright colors added closer to the water's edge. To the right of the frame, beyond the foregrounded rocks, is a forest in the mid-distance which gradually blends into a homogenously green mountain as it recedes to the far distance at the center of the frame. The distant mountains almost reach the top of the frame, ultimately rendered beneath a blue sky with swirling white clouds. This circling or swirling method of rendering, almost in an illustration or animation style, is extended to the rocks which feature numerous drooping curves, further accentuated by deep shadows. The strong contrast is maintained throughout the image, where the artist

has allowed shadows to dip toward darkness while keeping colors bright and vibrant, creating a slightly surreal effect. This effect is enhanced by certain choices in perspective, such as the tree at the left of the frame which curves towards the center of the canvas as if seen through a fish-eye lens.

Striking a balance between abstraction and the realism typically associated with landscape painting, Lake Tahoe-based artist Phyllis Shafer here presents a scene that manages to feel both alien and familiar. Objects closer to the viewer are largely rendered in more abstract forms, lacking the texture and hard lines of works more interested in realism, while objects further away are rendered more believably. These contradictions force the viewer to reexamine the nature of their perspective, particularly as directed towards the natural world, a category of

---

**Michaan's Auctions**

2701 Monarch Street, Alameda, CA 94501  
1-800-380-9822 | (510) 740-0220

experience that is frequently taken for granted. By making the familiar strange, Shafer encourages us to reexamine the world around us, to look more closely, and find moments of strange beauty in the natural world.

This painting is highly reminiscent of Phyllis Shafer's body of work, which frequently employs bright colors and distorted perspectives as tools for rendering the natural world in unexpected ways. The curvature of perspective typically associated with a fish-eye lens is chosen regularly by the artist. However, this work employs the technique to a lesser degree than many other pieces, making the final image much closer to a realistic depiction of the environment. Shafer's choice of bold colors and strong colors is emphasized in this painting, and, in this respect, the work is more abstract than many in her oeuvre. Working in plein air, her

paintings appropriate certain tools of abstraction while remaining grounded in the modernist tradition of landscape painting, allowing the viewer to find the transcendental within natural forms.



Phyllis Shafer was born in 1958 in Buffalo, New York. After attending SUNY Potsdam, she earned her MFA from the University of California, Berkeley in 1988. Since then, she has exhibited across the West Coast, particularly after beginning her work in the Sierra Nevada mountain range in 1994. Her work has been featured at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, the Crocker Museum, and MOMA's

---

**Michaan's Auctions**

2701 Monarch Street, Alameda, CA 94501  
1-800-380-9822 | (510) 740-0220

Centro Colombo-Americano Traveling Exhibition, and is held in the collections of the Tucson Museum of Art and the Nevada Museum of Art, amongst others. She is a retired faculty member in the Fine Arts Department at Lake Tahoe Community College and continues to paint prolifically to this day.

**Phyllis Shafer, Caples Lake,** oil was sold for \$9,100 in our May Gallery Auction. Our next sale will be Michaan's Auctions June Gallery Auction on Friday, June 14th. This sale features a deep collection of well-regarded pieces from the Jewelry Department, in addition to refined collections from the Silver & Objects de Vertu Department, and several fine

examples from the Rugs, Carpets & Textiles Department. The auction is led by the Jewelry Department, which will be offering rings, necklaces, and chains in gold, many featuring diamonds, while the Silver & Objects de Vertu Department offers collections of flatware and a notable tea service. Also included in the sale are several fine Persian carpets and rugs presented by the Rugs, Carpets & Textiles Department.

Michaan's Auctions catalogs can be viewed on our website: [www.michaans.com](http://www.michaans.com), LiveAuctioneers, and on our Michaan's Live site. Bid live in our gallery or remotely via absentee, phone, or online.

---

**Michaan's Auctions**

2701 Monarch Street, Alameda, CA 94501  
1-800-380-9822 | (510) 740-0220