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By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent April 14, 2015



Gallery NAGA

Bryan McFarlane's exuberant, expressionist paintings at Gallery NAGA straddle landscape and abstraction. In "Catfish in the Sky," a carnival of clouds whirls against a sodden sky over a peachy rose beach. Most of the clouds are giant, juicy squibs of paint. A cobalt blue shape like a swaddled babe floats along the surface, and the curve of a glinting fish flails right behind its head.

The show, titled "Stories in the Clouds" fixates on these lively, colorful fluffs. "Lucky Cloud" sets two knots of them against horizontal bands of soft, gray tones, some running with drips and streaked with color. The two clouds — one hangs off the right edge, the other we see in full — are lumpy, assertive, and chatty. McFarlane and his wife recently had a baby, and it's hard not to see something fetal in these forms — generative, wild with potential, a symbol of life.

Also at NAGA, Keira Kotler makes her pearlescent paintings glow. Kotler paints reflective material on a clear acrylic panel then adds layers of toned urethane, along with mica. "Pale Green, Meditation 2 [I Look for Light]" offers subtle progressions from pea green to mauve. It looks almost immaterial — a vessel for light.