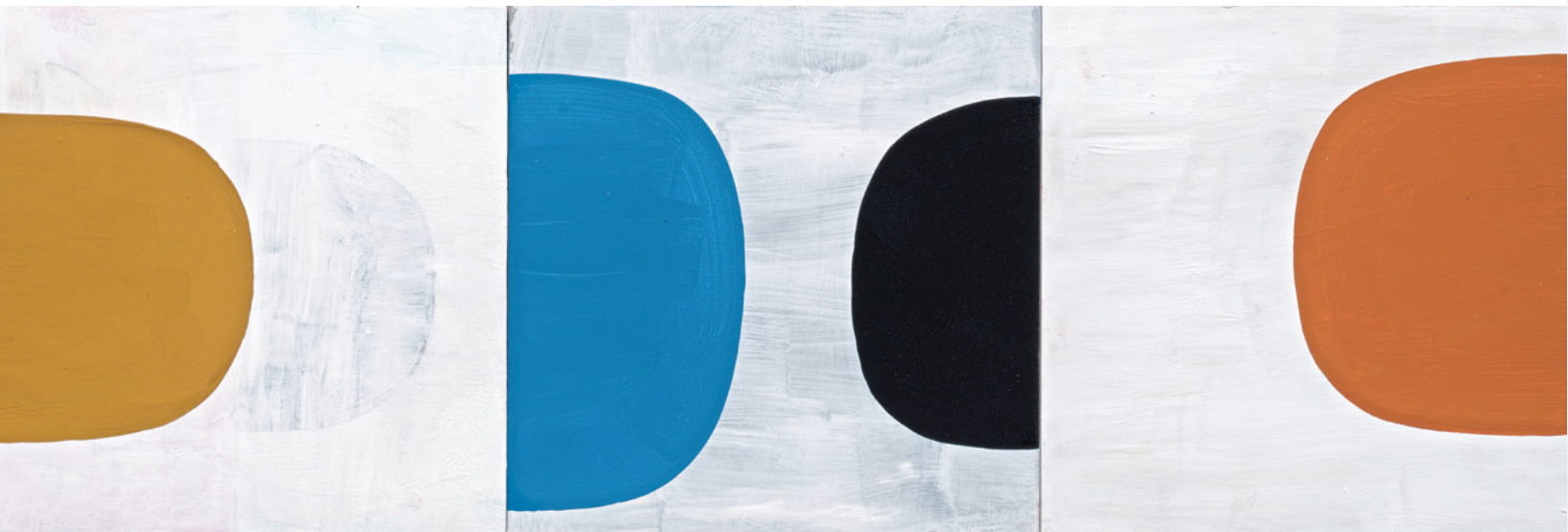


TERRI ROLLAND

Raw Sienna, 2016
Acrylic on panel, 8 x 30 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JENNIFER MURVIN

Hippo

The zoo is quiet midmorning on a weekday, today the first warm day in months and maybe the only warm day in months to come, and so Carol has taken her granddaughter, Sofia, to see the hippo. It is the little girl's favorite animal; at home there is a stuffed hippo with large teeth, children's books featuring child-hippos struggling to go to sleep, shirts with patchwork hippos, and a jacket with hippo faces imprinted in fleece on the elbows.

"Hippo?" little Sofia asks. It is one word of only a few available to her—someone who didn't know her might even call her a baby—thus carrying an exaggerated importance.

There is no hippo in the shallow water. It is winter in the small Missouri town, and often Carol has wondered how the giraffes and elephants fare here. She feels more comfortable watching the deer, the geese, the snakes in the snake house, logical animals.

They are standing on a small platform above the hippo's keep, where zoo guests can look down onto the hippo's wide back, watch his ears as they snap and dance. (Carol imagines the hippo, so very large after all, as a male.) Often the hippo is floating in the pool where the concrete edges rise like street curbs; other times he is crouched into the mud pit on a small sloping hill. Carol has never seen the hippo walk. She imagines he might simply disappear from the pool and reappear in the mud.

"Hippo?" Sofia asks again, her voice increasing in urgency. The grandmother remembers something about little children and object permanence, their inability to understand that even though Mommy has gone behind the corner, she has not left the house. This seems important.

"I don't know where the hippo is, darling," Carol says. There is a small opening above the water, but it is much too small for a hippo to fit through. Sofia is bright enough to understand this. Sofia is brighter than Carol's son, Sofia's father, was at this age. Carol sometimes wishes she could see more of her son in the girl. As an infant, it was easier. She does not tell anyone about the times she held the baby to her breast and imagined it was her son again, herself young, breasts full, all that love rushing over her in the way it used to before her son could say cruel things, could make mistakes, could hurt her, ignore her, leave her. But she knows it is only that he has grown up.

To make up for this, Carol offers her granddaughter an ice cream cone from one of the zoo vending machines.