

Grand Vista: Twenty-First Century Landscapes



Ilse Murdock
Interpret, 2014

Recent works by Else Murdock, Wes Sherman, Judy Simonian, Gary Stephan and Aaron Williams offer distinct perspectives on the contemporary landscape. Guest-curated by native New Jersey artists Danielle Wolfrum and Wes Sherman, these artworks investigate the landscape as an enduring theme in genre painting as it enters the twenty-first century.

Landscape painting has a romantic past but these artists offer us a fresh take on it. The use of paint weaves pictorial narratives of the artist's journey, with each artist building their own world within their landscape. The irony is in the theme; landscape paintings by their very genre have romantic overtones to them, yet each of these paintings seems cool and stand-offish, similar to that of 20th century paintings. - Danielle Wolfrum

Ilse Murdock

Murdock's concern for the environment is reflected in her use of the painting as palette. Shaking up our expectations of the process of painting and its byproduct, she states: "My desire has been to show that which might not ordinarily be considered desirable for viewing, specifically byproducts of painting practices and byproducts of everyday life, and re-present these byproducts in another context... as an integral part of a life process." Her work is a meditation on the nature of humanity's relationship to the natural world.

Wes Sherman www.wesshermanstudio.com

The reclamation of contemporary landscape painting is an ongoing project for Sherman. In his study of the expressive potential of the grand vista, he references the technically vigorous landscapes of the Hudson River School painters of the late 1800s. Their work celebrated the power of the American wilderness and was an expression of the burgeoning nationalism of the age.

Sherman's work focuses on the light and air within the natural landscape. Like the Hudson River artists, he typically begins a painting *en plein-air* (on site outdoors), and finishes it in his studio in northern New Jersey. The hallmarks of his working methods, a flattened field, parallel brushstrokes, firmly root his work in the twenty-first century.



Wes Sherman
NPP#120-21 (Crater Lake), 2014



Judith Simonian www.judithsimonian.com

Simonian's paintings offer an incongruous play of atmospheric washes against vivid splashes of color. Presenting the viewer with a puzzle of fragmented space and shapes, recognizable objects are overlaid with unfamiliar forms, in a sort of painting-collage hybrid. A technically proficient painter, her work offers a dichotomy of painting styles: here a blurry rendering of space and there a sharply drawn object.

Judith Simonian,
Patio Lounge Chairs, 2013

Gary Stephan www.garystephanstudio.com

Arrangements of transparent and opaque layers of paint form a latticework in Stephan's landscapes. His work presents us with the dilemma of painting: what is real, what is surface? Bands of paint crisscross the canvas over a more literal representation of terrain. His is a spare urban view of the post-modern landscape that challenges the viewer to gain a better understanding of his work by taking a closer look.



Gary Stephan, *Untitled*, 2004
Oil on canvas



Aaron Williams www.aaronswilliams.com

Williams' work is distinctively American in his reverence for the sublime wilderness. However, his approach to landscapes is different from the other artists in this exhibition. The basis for his "painting" is a stock image. Destroying this perfect image, he super-imposes his own abstract painting over it, challenging our perception of three dimensional space. His work is clean and cerebral with no interest in revealing the artist's hand.

Aaron Williams, *Untitled (Alps)*, 2012

...these artists seem to be rejecting a 20th century view of art and are taking a different approach to a traditional form in a more historical and philosophical way. - Danielle Wolfrum

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