



COURTESY LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

Painter Shay Kun's "Final Frontier," a symmetrical lakefront landscape and part of his "Slack Tide" exhibit at LaMontagne Gallery.

# Echoing and altering the landscape

By Cate McQuaid

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Painter Shay Kun's conceit is simple. His exhibition at LaMontagne Gallery features exquisitely

**GALLERIES** painted landscapes that echo those of 19th-

century American masters such as Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt. Into these he drops odd characters who enact perplexing narratives, disrupting these odes to nature's majesty with bizarre and often violent human agency.

Sometimes the incursion is small, as in "If You Don't Have a Strategy, You're Part of Someone Else's Strategy," which lulls the viewer with rolling hills, a meandering brook, and the operatic play of dark clouds and sunlight in the sky. In the middle ground, a wreath hangs from a branch, ablaze with flame. Two men have propped a ladder against the tree's trunk. Kun's narrative is deliberately oblique. Is this a ritual? Some kind of effigy? It's not clear. What is clear is that human presence besmirches the peaceful landscape.

Kun is wonderfully skilled with a brush. He evokes leaves, lichen, and reflections with daunting precision, weaving a spell. "Final Frontier," a lovely, autumnal lakefront landscape, is eerily symmetrical, with mirror

images split by a maypole in the center. Orange, yellow, and red banners swoop toward us through the sky, and auburn trees lean in from the edges. In the bottom corners, commandos in body armor aim machine guns over the placid lake.

In their time, Hudson River School landscapes, and Western scenes like Bierstadt's, lauded the beauty and potential of their subjects. God's presence was implied in a shaft of light. From a 21st-century vantage point, Kun's reprises are elegiac, praise songs to a utopia that never came to be, and illustrations of how humanity's hand has corrupted nature's possibility. It's not a new theme, but Kun pulls it off with both horror and humor.

**SHAY KUN: Slack Tide**

At: LaMontagne Gallery,  
555 East 2d St., South Boston,  
through Feb. 13. 617-464-4640,  
[www.lamontagnegallery.com](http://www.lamontagnegallery.com)