



Walking Hand in Hand

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Nostalgia for the Future"
Where: STC VAM Art Gallery, Bldg. B-103, Pecan Street campus
When: Jan. 21-Feb. 20, 2020
Hours: 8am-3pm Tues., Wed., Thurs.
Contact: artgallery@southtexascolleg.edu

Fear of Climate Crisis

Paintings as speculative fiction formats the crisis of climate change from a future past.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

San Antonio artist Jason Willome is back in the Rio Grande Valley bringing his anxieties and fears with him. His exhibition of paintings, "Nostalgia for the Future", is currently on display at the South Texas College Art Gallery and offers thought provoking aspects of climate change effects as well as unique painting techniques on canvas. This body of work is framed through the perspective of the future, with the viewer seeing the future as having already happened. Our future nostalgia is our current present.

Margaret Atwood served as a muse for this series. Perceiving her as a futuristic thinker, Willome explained, "Margaret Atwood thinks of herself as a speculative fiction writer - not science fiction, but speculative fiction. She looks at what's going on right now and follows the logic of that narrative." Inspired by this concept of logical narrative speculation, Willome shifted it into painting. His narrative concerns the crisis of climate change and the looking back at moments in time from a future past when we could have done something. He shows us desolated landscapes, a few with structures from previous habitation, and creates a detached beauty of desolation.

“Nostalgia for the Future” posits the idea of the painting as fiction, as an illusion of an actuality. He merges his narrative illusions with physical surface illusion. “What I’m really interested in painting right now is the difference between flatness and depth,” he declared, “I love the things about painting that tend to be invisible.” Historically, paintings have demanded a suspended disbelief in their appreciation, with early painters conceiving images as being seen through a window. Viewers became conditioned to not even be aware of the square or rectangular shape that contained the image, and if there is a strong image, to also ignore the marks that capture and make it. “Return to Splendor” reminds us of this illusion through the window of a long-deserted house, but throughout the show the structures have gone, leaving us with only the fictions of their narrative. Willome forms his illusions by asserting the surface as much as possible to enforce the idea of a fiction. Limiting his palette to a pair of complementary colors and neutrals, the paint surfaces are rich with textures and textural overlays that build up a three-dimensional illusion that looks unexpectedly flat until close observation. Some of the paint applications are thick enough to suggest bas-relief. Land areas are ambiguous surfaces that appear to be snow, water, sand, peeled-back topographical strata, or something else - all simultaneously. In “Bored of Glamour”, images of single boards possessing wood-grain pattern illusions appear as shapes reminiscent of thin forest-trees falling and floating. These randomly placed board images repeat in other works.

The works include acrylic, acrylic latex, and spray paint – petroleum-derived materials which have become important to the artist while exploring his narrative. Used to shape images of melting icebergs, fire, flood, and depict the general desolation of the future, they seem matter-of-fact now, but will likely gain a questionable visibility as the climate crisis continues to emerge. “These paintings are fictions about fictions,” Willome concluded, “beautiful false memories of idealized spaces from that time when we could make paintings about climate change out of plastic.”

The cynic as artist, his paintings are seen as a practice in fiction that reflects our truth as a species of near-sighted, self-involved pretenders. These works ultimately explore the willful ignorance that exists in our current moment, depicting scenes that express a personal anxiety about climate disaster while playing with the ambiguity of the picture plane.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rg.rr.com