

PRESS RELEASE

Stepanek & Maslin

Alice Stepanek and Steven Maslin have been working together for over twenty years, painting studies and comments on the subject of Nature. This new body of paintings is primarily concerned with the environment and issues related to global warming.

Stepanek and Maslin's most recent work addresses the subject of humankind's paradoxical relationship to its natural environment. In the moment when climate change denial has finally crumbled, the paintings have gained a great poignancy. Since the 1980's scientific research has left no doubt about the consequences of human carbon dioxide output upon the environment. Stepanek and Maslin have followed this research with keen interest and it has found expression in their images in a variety of forms.

Last year the horizon line returned to Stepanek and Maslin's work. A passing glimpse might register the paintings as conventional landscapes, but when the viewer lingers a moment longer they are quickly caught up in a mass of visual subterfuge. This is not a horizon line stretching serenely from one edge of the canvas to another, confirming the human's place in the world. Instead the viewer is confronted with segmented landscapes, divided by bold verticals of tree trunks, which invade the foreground and split the canvas into a series of "frames", each containing disparate scenes of nature. At times the segments are nominally linked, at others they disregard visual sense and convention, the horizon jumping from one level to another as the length of the painting is traversed.

The nature portrayed is still beautiful in its individual elements, nothing is ugly or shocking. The images are not "catastrophic" (a term now used with pornographic abandon when referring to climate). Yet the paintings are disturbing because of their quirkiness and restlessness, the viewer is left trying to piece together some sense, attempting to retrieve harmony and order.

Common with their work of the 1990's and beyond, the paintings remain an uninhabited stage. Indeed it is from the absence of humanity that they derive part of their tension. It is the viewer who must create the story; the artists have simply provided the set. There are different paths and ways within the new works, which enable a variety of scenarios and outcomes. The observer is left to decide on the direction, to face the choice of which path to follow and risk taking the wrong track.

The compositions appear photographic or computer manipulated, "cut and paste" comes to mind, but while the paintings are constructed from an array of images, which Stepanek and Maslin have photographed themselves, the computer doesn't play a role. The paintings are composed on the canvas, built up from individual elements to create a complete image. Each element finds its place in an ongoing process of decision making between the artists in front of the canvas. They reiterate that the reworking of images is

an artistic process with hundreds of years of history, not the result of the recent development of computer software.

The artists create a painted space where it is difficult to judge in which moment, or state, we stand. It is neither the ideal paradise nor the post-human order. Using simple compositional devices they create a familiar yet chaotic world, a vision simultaneously utopic and dystopic, manoeuvring between culture and nature, asking to what degree these opposites are mutually dependent.

We live in a world in which natural beauty is idealised and revered, and concurrently neglected and extinguished. The consequence of our actions, of our indifference, is becoming forever more foreseeable and unpredictable. Stepanek and Maslin's paintings are a reminder of all that we should strive to keep when we find ourselves in a process of rapid loss.

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