



Joy Garnett, *Evac*, 2005.



Joy Garnett, *Flood 5*, 2006.

Grammar.police, <http://grammarpolice.net> – August 1, 2007

Joy Garnett, "Strange Weather"

By Kriston Capps

Review of "Strange Weather", an exhibition of nine paintings by Joy Garnett at the National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, May 8-July 30, 2007.

Like the images on which they're based—photographs of New Orleans snapped during and after Hurricane Katrina—Joy Garnett's paintings are sensational. "Strange Weather", an exhibit of nine landscapes in oil, shows both political and painterly acumen. The New York-based painter takes the long view: She selects, or rather appropriates, artistic and journalistic photographs of the devastated city, most of them snapped from significant physical remove. By painting from these landscape and aerial photographs, Garnett adds another remove—one that has the result of making the images more immediate.

The fact that she paints these images changes their context. Certainly, her expressionistic style adds intimacy; Garnett is a patient painter, and she chooses carefully when to depart from her expansive brush stroke. Consider the thick dabs of light paint that rise off the surface of *Strange Weather 32* or the melee of *Flood 5*. Moreover, Garnett has chosen to treat Katrina through the unlikely lens of landscape painting, a genre that has its own associations for viewers. And when it comes to political art, no one expects a landscape exhibition.

Viewers have associations with the root images themselves—varying degrees of horror with the storm, its consequences, its political implications, and its depiction in the media. By the images Garnett selects and by her mediation of these images, she addresses all these responses.

Flood 2, for example, looks like no catastrophe so much as the smiting of Sodom and Gomorrah: A great tower of smoke rises in the background, while in the foreground a hot cherry fireball burns brightly. Buildings and other evidence of human activity are lost in a tidal wash of sea, ash, and oil.

For *Evac*, Garnett selects a stretch of lost highway on which only one vehicle moves, the landscape black and the sky crimson and yellow. This image is ambiguous—it's impossible to tell whether the vehicle is coming or going, first or last.

In the most vivid painting in the series, *Flood 5*, flesh-toned fire and choking smoke are reflected on a madly painted, oil-slicked body of water. Garnett pushes this image to the point of voyeurism, to match and comment on the original photo, finding something that the photographs don't—calling to mind Kasimir Edschmid's lines, "The expressionist does not look, he sees."