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REVIEW: GREENER PASTURES, PERMANENT MIDNIGHT

Curated by Ingrid Chu, Moti Hasson Gallery - through September 1

Landscape on the installation plan

By Jeffrey Cyphers Wright

In an age when information is relayed digitally and media can nullify and numb our experiences, what does it mean to recreate nature and instill a visceral or emotional response?

In addressing this question, curator **Ingrid Chu** chose artists who combined an "ecological sensibility" with the "obscure, subtle and aesthetic." And she felt it was important to present an actual 3-D landscape replete with trees and lightning.

Katie Holten began her installation of seven trees by looking at pictures taken after a forest fire and replicating the charred trunks. While remaining faithful to reality, she uses simple materials that carry their own implications. The shiny black gaffer tape that wraps around the trees like bark hints at global warming, thus politicizing the work. The shapes, removed from their original context, become like spires, inciting a spiritual reaction.

In pitch-perfect contrast, white lightning bolts descend like roots from the ceiling. **Emilie Halpern's** thermoplastic-coated aluminum wires come down with jagged awe. The shock associated with such elemental force is compressed and relayed.

Disaster—alluring and terribly beautiful—is at the heart of painter **Joy Garnett's** vistas. She is known for finding dramatic photos and painting them very quickly (in a day). The triple play of composition, gesture and color provides an immediacy that is truly transportive. In "Storm" broiling clouds ride over a downpour of wraiths as the sun is surrounded.

"Road" is a siren song. Up ahead, around the bend and behind a bank of bulging fauna, an awful profusion of light pulls like a magnet and pushes like a flood. Hints of improbable and ghostly green and virulent lavender are dabbed into the vortex. Faint fence-posts reassuringly guide us toward catastrophe in this nocturne gone perfectly awry.

Sticking with nocturnes, Emilie Halpern's three c-prints court darkness and distance. Inky blackness splattered by a few stars pours down like fine dust to isolate a glittering skyline. Our vantage is telescoped as if we were standing in a cave mouth or on the threshold of a portal. A sense of utter vulnerability is both availed and softened by Halpern's reintroduction of texture as she manipulates her image and adds evidence of materiality in a slippery world.

In "the dark side of the moon," Halpern reintroduces texture conceptually, by taking a picture of what scientists imagined the unseen side of the moon looked like.

Examining the constraints of landscape, **Dike Blair's** pair of windows moves to the interior. Even though we look out over a geometrically lined runway with all its implications of escape, we feel trapped behind a double pane. Likewise, in a cropped section of a window and jamb, the outdoors seems unattainable. We look up and out into nothing but a bluntly seductive blue.

A dark shadow slashes across the wall. Blair's minimalism is tempered by the velvety gouache and rough pencil. These untitled pieces just plain out look good.

A digital video animation by **Franklin Evans** explores a regenerative aspect of landscape. Wily trees grow out of the tops of trees in a collage of textures cut out of art history classics as the screen scrolls down. An Indian chant changes into a slow, catchy song as a pinwheel of colors bursts out from a face. Finally, a voice says "okay," suggesting a genuine connection in this delicious high-tech/down-home concoction. His busy, bright and convoluted watercolors, however, weren't for me.

In a culminating installation in the side gallery, Halpern's dramatic ceiling-to-floor "Lightning #4" is commanding. Two arms of "electricity" snake out diagonally from the upper corners and join at eye level, then splinter and spill. An acrylic mirror on the floor resembling water and invoking infinity carries the charge deep below, reminding us that lightning travels through water. Here at the edge of annihilation, the sublime is a transformative agent.