



Flood 5. 2006, oil on canvas, 54 x 60 inches.

Strange Weather: New Paintings by Joy Garnett

In a period when media-influenced imagery and digital mediums are ubiquitous in the mainstream art world, Joy Garnett has perversely gone in the other direction. As a self-described "information junkie," her sources are photographs from the news media in the five years since September 11th, 2001. But as an artist determined to control her own means of production, she makes good old-fashioned landscape paintings...with a twist.

Garnett sees her process in terms of Open Source Culture (OSC) -- the more-or-less public reservoir from which anyone can drink deeply of imagery initially intended for a sip at best. She describes this apparently new system, available for translation, transformation, or appropriation, as "really the longstanding operative principle for innovation... Nothing comes out of thin air." Thus her work parallels that of collagists and appropriators -- software hackers, DJ samplers and a number of artists. But these straightforward paintings are not visual collages so much as conceptual collages; the comments on art and technology are invisible, while the planetary/atmospheric ramifications take front stage.

"Strange Weather" is an astute understatement for what the world is undergoing. Equally strange is the apathy with which news of cataclysmic change is being received. Garnett's work reflects that change in a deceptively conventional manner. We have all seen a plethora of images -- from the news and from art photographers -- of the devastation wrought by hurricane Katrina. But when we see those images, usually perceived/received so fast they barely register, translated into independent works of art, they are less recognizable. *Flood 3* becomes a majestic icon of destruction in the fall-of-empire genre.

First we are immersed in the great billows of paint -- smoke and clouds, shards of fire, bodies of land -- then

we move on to the context. The apocalyptic nature of the events depicted is most evident in the skies. Some are operatically dramatic, others are eerily calming, color alone conveying the unusual. Art history is evoked only to be revoked. *Evac* is half sky, half land like many Dutch 17th-century canvases; *Flood 5* and *Plume 2* evoke the ominous sublime of monumental 19th-century landscapes. Devastation is understated in *Live Oak*, where the great old tree (many were victims of the storm) recalls early Mondrian. The rising waters appear peaceful and beneficent; they are in fact lethal.

Landscape painting contains its own paradoxes in these days of photographic ascendancy, when photographs have finally been recognized as no more "truthful" than any other medium. Curiously, the distance afforded by a painting permits a more intimate experience of the effects of Katrina than the fragmented, momentary blitz of media photography. By reinventing her photographic sources, Garnett gives us time to be there, in place, on solid ground, however terrifying that may be. Simultaneously, by merging political and physical phenomena, she pulls the rug out from under our previous sources of information, perhaps even making us nostalgic for the impersonal flashes of media imagery that allow us to avoid responsibility for the environmental and social catastrophes we face.

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Lucy R. Lippard is an internationally known writer, activist and curator. She has written eighteen books on contemporary art, and is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Frank Mather Award for Criticism from the College Art Association, and two National Endowment for the Arts grants in criticism.



Courtesy Nick Debs, New York City
Live Oak. 2005, oil on canvas, 54 x 60 inches.