



Red Sea (2000). Oil on canvas, 38 x 48 inches.

## **TimeOut New York**

Issue No. 295 May 17-24, 2001

Art Review

Joy Garnett, "Rocket Science" at Debs & Co.

By Kevin Pratt

Sometimes, just by the act of seeing, we are unwillingly seduced. Consider modern warfare—frozen on tape, celluloid or as disembodied bits—which has shown us a terrible beauty, born of technology, that is resolved outside the boundaries of moral suasion. Painter Joy Garnett has taken this CNN-style impasto, culled from military archives and conspiracy-clearinghouse websites, and used it to create a series of luminous paintings. In *Crash*, an aircraft skids across the canvas in a trail of blurred fire, while *Stealth* depicts three black wedges, pregnant with malice, drifting through a hazy sky. On other walls, the shuttle *Challenger* is caught in its iconic explosion, while a submarine sits quietly nearby in the shoals of a sea reddened by the sunrise.

The paintings all seem full of suppressed noise: screaming rockets, the dull thunder of artillery. Maybe they exist in the interval between the thing seen and the thing heard. Garnett paints with a rapid-fire but fluid, directional stroke. Knowing this, you can imagine she hoped to finish before the implicit violence and death could sink into the colors and dull their luster. Present throughout the show is a feeling of time suspended, as if each image were a frame cut from a lost film. Somehow, this quality amplifies the scenographic qualities of the work. Who knew that the afterburners of a fighter jet created such effective chiaroscuro?

It is this close observation that gives Garnett's paintings the kick that saves them from mere fetishism. By forcing the play of light and shadow onto weapons of mass destruction, or limning the rosy glow of sunlight on rocket contrails, she suggests that we have learned to divest visual beauty of its temporality and consequence. While this may not be a particularly novel insight, it remains a point worth making in a world saturated by vast catalogs of discontinuous information. As it is, we're already a little too dazzled by the products of the more gruesome sectors of our technoindustrial economy.

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