

REVIEWS



Charles Wilcoxon's oil is among the works in the exhibition "Landscape Revisited: Fact and Metaphor" at the City Without Walls gallery in Newark.

Updating the landscape

Contemporary vistas on display at City Without Walls

ART

Landscape Revisited: Fact and Metaphor

Where: City Without Walls, 6 Crawford St., Newark

When: Through March 29. Noon -6 p.m. Wednesdays-Fridays; 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays

How much: Free. Call (973) 622-1188 or visit www.citywithoutwalls.org.

BY DAN BISCHOFF
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

"Landscape Revisited: Fact and Metaphor" at the City Without Walls in Newark is a show of contemporary landscapes selected by one of the region's more accomplished landscapists, Peter Homitzky, who has been based in Hoboken for many years.

This show is something of a valedictory for Homitzky, 64, who is moving soon to upstate New York. That's too bad, because Homitzky seemed a particularly good artistic match for lush and industrial New Jersey. This is an artist whose simplified realism in the neo-Precisionist style has transformed into an ironic Romanticism.

The meaning of landscape painting has changed over history as the traditional landscape itself has been disappearing. The most popular landscapes of our day are the perspectival fantasies of Pop artist Wayne Thiebaud, and it's interesting to hear what Homitzky has to say about the form in his curatorial note for "Landscape Revisited."

"The prevalent attitudes towards landscape art today," Homitzky writes, "are rooted in the past, most notably 1960s advertising and commercial graphic arts, or a kind of paraclassical kitsch with maybe a little irony shoehorned in. Then there are the works where nostalgia and a saccharin romanticism are whining... no one ever told these worthies that nostalgia is a benign form of depression, or that paranoids are the only romantics we have left. I looked for artists that have at least one foot planted in their own time..."

There are about 20 of these artists in "Landscape Revisited" (and many of them are showing in the halls of the Seton Hall Law School in Newark through March 29 as a satellite exhibition to this one), working in styles that range from nearly pure abstraction to cartoonish dash to a kind of precisionism not that far from Homitzky's own. (The curator does not include one of his own landscapes here, unfortunately.)

Charles Wilcoxon's "Exit 29a" and "Clocktower" are probably most Homitzky-like here, in their toy-like simplicity. But Eric Soll's big canvases of Newark transshipment points ("Industrial Flow" and "Rhythm of Industry") mix the simplified shapes of truck containers and industrial sheds with illusionistic color and light in a way that defies sentiment yet still produces something of the grandeur, of

these views, a self-contradictory twist that Homitzky surely appreciates.

Similarly, JoAnne Lobotsky's aerial views of Newark, in which the broken grid of city streets often seems disrupted by newly sprouted volcanoes or alluvial mud flows, force us to read them like clue-sprinkled maps, to wonder what exactly is going on in the images. Are these records of destruction, fantasies of environmental revenge, or Mars-Explorer-type snapshots of some future landscape?

Louise Lieber, on the other hand, has abstracted these aerial views into Minimalist registers, making pictures ("View from Avalon #6 and #9") that are reminiscent of the flattened rectangular vision of California landscapes produced by Richard Diebenkorn in the 1960s and '70s. They have a peculiarly lovely palette of teals, blues and golden greens, certainly among the most decorative objects in this show.

Landscape, like any depiction of a Native American, is now a guilt trope, a needle prick to the popular consciousness. The movies can still find remote stretches of some empty island (like New Zealand) to film epic scenes of ancient bounty, but the idea of a captain of industry coming home to a study lined with George Inness-style paintings of bucolic beauty is as outdated as spats and cellulose collars.

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