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ART REVIEW

This Landscape Is Your Landscape

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Newark



"Industrial Flow" by Eric Soll.

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So many exhibitions have been devoted to landscape in [New Jersey](#) that one more might seem redundant, but the scale and pace of real estate development in cities like Jersey City, Asbury Park and Newark have perhaps made the subject fresh again. "Landscape Revisited: Fact and Metaphor," split between City Without Walls and the [Seton Hall University](#) School of Law, revisits this theme.

Organized by Peter Homitzky, a Hoboken-based landscape painter, the exhibition is a sprawling survey of the proliferation of contemporary landscape imagery. The work itself, by 19 artists, mostly takes the New Jersey landscape as its point of departure, even though only about half of the artists live in the state. The others are from New York City and elsewhere.

Landscape exhibitions in New Jersey are generally stocked with pictures of depopulated salt marshes and postindustrial rot. "Landscape Revisited" conforms to this stereotype, but delivers something else besides; let's call it a more imaginative perspective, for the work here is generally concerned less with the truth than with the New Jersey landscape's poetic possibilities.

Many of the paintings are tightly cropped studies of seemingly banal corners of suburbia. To note the filmic quality of these pictures is perhaps to state the obvious, for most young realist artists these days paint from projected slide images of photographs, usually omitting niggling details and complexities of light and tone. This gives the work a compositional elegance, but there is also a nagging sense that the landscapes we are looking at are not quite real.

A painting of a freeway bisecting an urban area, by Richard Leon of Jersey City, is among the most cinematic in the exhibition. It's also the most artificial-looking; its fluorescent parkland, clean median strips, hauntingly empty streets and illuminated buildings come across as simulated and unnatural, even though there is something very familiar about the scene. It is almost as if the artist has created an imitation or ersatz version of the real. (This painting is at Seton Hall; Mr. Leon, like nearly all the artists in the show, has work in both places.)

Other artists offer more impressionistic views, frequently working in an abstract, semiabstract or even Surrealist style that results in ambiguous images whose locations are hard to identify. The paintings by José del Solar of Perth Amboy are among the most intriguing examples, the artist creating abstract landscapes of sky, trees and clouds out of little more than blocky scraps of color. The pictures are thoughtful without seeming labored.

There are also paintings made using satellite imaging from Internet sources like Google Earth, including eloquent, kaleidoscopic works by Louise Lieber, a Florida-based artist whose passion for pure color is unmatched in this exhibition. She paints abstracted views of segments of aerial maps of urban environments. She is also one of the few artists here who does not work in oil, preferring the tricky medium of watercolor. This gives her colors an added luminosity.

Like Ms. Lieber, the Bronx-based painter JoAnne Lobotsky also draws on satellite imagery, though with a twist. Her paintings conflate all different kinds of aerial perspectives, from straight above to side elevation views, creating a kind of imaginative, multidimensional

space. Walk around her paintings and the cleverness of the gesture is quickly revealed: the perspective begins to change as different components of the picture come in and out of focus.

It is not entirely clear how Carlo Vialu of New York City slipped into this grouping, for he makes landscape collages with photography. His constructions are ingenious: he cuts out parts of a landscape photograph to create a negative space, shreds the castoffs and arranges them in piles to re-create foreground details — rocks, flower beds, trash and the like. The trick of turning shredded photographs into landscape scenery is delightfully original. The intricacy of the handiwork is also impressive.

The rest of the show samples different attitudes toward landscape art today. Some of the artists draw on Pop Art for inspiration, while others reprise more traditional, academic themes of landscape and the romantic sensibility. Others, less confident perhaps, or just young, riff on the work of better-known artists; Gerhard Richter, Robert Bechtle and Charles Sheeler are some of the possible sources of inspiration.

Appropriately enough, the best works are split evenly between the venues, though the area given over for their display at Seton Hall University is less than perfect — basically, the outside corridor walls of classrooms on three levels of the building. The walls were not repainted before the art was hung, revealing a patchwork of touchups in different kinds of paint. This is unsightly, and does a tremendous disservice to the exhibiting artists in this stirring survey of the contemporary landscape genre.

“Landscape Revisited: Fact and Metaphor,” City Without Walls, 6 Crawford Street, Newark, through March 29, and Seton Hall University School of Law, 1 Newark Center, Newark, through April 27. Information: (973) 622-1188 or www.cwow.org.