

Twilight: Landscapes of the Mind



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The shifting light and shadows of Kim Kever's large C-print photographs set a tone of transitoriness for the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art's exhibition, *Twilight*. The concept is strangely apt for our present dangers in a world that is less reliable than we might have had reason to assume. Light and dark are metaphoric matters with attendant oppositions, and *Twilight* assumes the mutation from one to the other. The moment of transition from day into night is magical and fleeting.

Like the grand landscape images of the German-born Hudson River School painter Albert Bierstadt or the German painter Caspar David Friedrich, Kever's work transports its viewers to worlds in which emotion dominates the order of things. The Hudson River painters sought a sublime and edenic America that was both uplifting and, at times, dizzying. They were selective and deliberate in choosing the perfect point of view, the grandest light and the most mysterious darks, elaborating on the suggestions of nature by "revisoning" nature to the requirements of their own imaginations. Kever's images are themselves a "revisoning" of the romantic impulse to create a heroic and challenging context for human experience.

Utilizing underwater props and artificial lighting, Kever makes a believable fiction of earthly tumult and drama. His "landscapes" are archetypal territories of amber and green serenity veiling darker anxieties, a kind of middle place, where all is not quite what it was or would be. Skies billow and swirl; light breaks through mist, glowing on mossy and dying trees; rocks split against the history of weather and time. The coral and dark gold colors of clouds at dusk last only long enough to disappear as we name them.

Megan Greene's pencil-and-gouache drawings are organic inventions of jeweled, feathered, horned, and reptilian forms that emerge from their black surfaces as luminous signs from a world of secret sensualities. *Cyclops Suite 1* is a pendant-like bit of Victoriana that joins delicately drawn chains, stripped tails, ribbons, a geared machine wheel, and numerous forms curling and tangling around a small circular gem that faintly reflects Jan Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*. These protean drawings precisely join and layer sources that are ornamental, mechanical, ritualistic, and erotic. Given this evidence of a fiercely aesthetic conviction, one has the sense that if she has enough time, Greene may be able to enshrine desire itself.

Bennett Morris's installation of a small model of a naval ship being crushed in a sea of polar ice recalls Friedrich's 1823 painting *Sea of Ice*. Like Friedrich, Morris creates a beautiful and dangerous context of tragic narrative. A multi-media artist, Morris projects a wall-filling backdrop of a bubbling watery depth behind the model that invites the soft release of drowning against the sharp smashing of the ice against the ship. The unfortunate size of the model, however, makes it feel like a minor history museum exhibit, offering an impersonal drama witnessed through a god's-eye view of a distant human catastrophe.

The largest work in *Twilight* is Jim Campbell's *Last Day in the Beginning of March*, an installation in the darkened rear gallery of the ICA space. Cannistered lamps suspended from the ceiling throw small, soft-edged pools of light on the floor. Each of the lamps is wired to a small metal box presented at eye level with a word or phrase that describes an element from the day of the artist's brother's death. The words are expressed with a particular pulsation of light emitted from the connected lamp. Three adjacent boxes each bear the word "Voices," their dim, flickering rhythm softly out of sync with the nearby light for "Matches," or further along, a jarring "Vomiting." Each time one stops to read a word and sense the pulse of the light, one enters more completely into a kind of emotional gloaming. Taking in the whole space with the light circles in the enveloping dark, there is something of the feeling of memory as a transferable and organic entity. Campbell employs quite simple means, yet his work effectively creates a bridge between himself and his audience.

Both Campbell and Greene employ the limitations of black and white (or back and a slightly golden version of white). Their work, though otherwise different from one another's, creates imagery that emerges from the shadows, like a sadness that wells up and slips into consciousness. What is significant is that what they present is not easy to take or to absorb. Greene's rigorously drawn images are like fishhooks that snag the psyche and take hold. Campbell's installation has the feel of a strange country that one did not plan to visit on the way to somewhere else, but cannot leave.

by DAVID RAYMOND