

CURATING THE COLLECTION: JENNA HANS

Redemption of Eden

Mary Augustine Gallery

September 06, 2012 to October 06, 2012

"Perhaps all landscape in the post-Christian tradition contains the possibility of redemption, such that Eden is transferred from the past to the future." -Michael Newman

Redemption of Eden features work by artists Stan Douglas, Todd Hido, Catherine Opie, and Alexis Smith. The photographs can be understood as depictions of manifestations of human impact. In these photographs, the human form is absent, but their presence is implicit in the desolate highways, abandoned railroad station, and ghostly roads receding into the horizon. By taking photographs of altered landscapes that are devoid of human presence, we are documenting the significance of the conflict between the human and natural world.

Landscape painting is one of the oldest genres of painting. The frescoes of Ancient Greece and Rome are among the earliest examples of pure western landscape paintings. In the east, *Shan Sui* (mountain – water), a Chinese ink painting tradition, was the primary form of landscape depiction. Romanticism often comes to mind when thinking about landscape paintings. This movement, which reached its height between 1800 and 1840, was a rebellion against the aristocratic notions that became popular during the Industrial Revolution. Many artists felt a pull to return to nature and natural forms to escape the visual aesthetic of machines and new technology. Caspar David Friedrich and JMW Turner were among the first artists to use the power of nature to illustrate emotional experience as a form of artistic expression.

Photography, with its factual depictions of the world, was quickly adapted to capture landscapes. When considering landscape photography, we must acknowledge that the images captured on film are consciously chosen representations of locations. Landscape is not merely captured on film, but consciously framed. Framing limits what is seen and supports both a particular perspective and the specificity of location, which determines what is included and excluded. *Redemption of Eden* seeks to analyze the intentional lack of humans in the landscapes in relation to a conversation on Landscape Theory held by The Art Seminar in June of 2006.

During this seminar several scholars examined representations of American landscapes and the desire to regain a state of Eden. Michael Newman suggests that “all landscapes in the post-christian tradition contain the possibility of redemption such that Eden is transferred from the past to the future.” By representing landscapes as non-idealized and mundane sites, these images acknowledge the human effect on the natural world, yet posit this cohabitation as a contemporary sublime aesthetic experience.

This discussion suggests that by representing landscapes, we are consciously choosing to acknowledge the Eden that we have altered through the industrialization of the land. However, can Eden exist once humans have altered these landscapes? What happens when humans no longer inhabit these altered spaces? What is the future of Eden?

The juxtaposition of photographs in *Redemption of Eden* explore the poetic implications of truth that these images of uninhabited locations contain. The anxieties created by removing people from the landscape suggests a longing for the redemption man desires—the hope of regaining the Eden that once was the western landscape.

Redemption of Eden was curated by Jenna Hans.

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