

303 Gallery is pleased to present our third exhibition of new paintings by Inka Essenhigh. The artist's latest body of work touches on notions proffered by 18th century Romanticist William Blake, who wrote, "Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow."

The ostensible subject of the paintings is landscape, the natural world. The paintings' lush backdrops (most directly drawn from her studio in coastal Maine) are rendered almost 3-dimensionally, bathed in a celestial light that gives the scenarios a hazy, hypnagogic quality. Yet the work is imbued with a sense of the hidden spirits revealed by profound communion with one's surroundings. Anthropomorphic figures drift in and out of perception, as Essenhigh creates visionary episodes of realization and engagement with the spirit world. In "Green Goddess," a chimerical female figure swathed in forest flora rises out of the ground, with an impetuous smile that beckons the viewer into her nether world. Her appendages double back into the forest, wispy clouds that form one of many trails into the beyond.

In "Lower East Side," Essenhigh envisions her New York street as a mythical cornucopia of figures, with street denizens magnetically pulled into a hallucinatory street cave, awash in pink light. The pallid glow of the street implies the aftermath of an ambiguous catastrophe with all the uncertainty and desperation that come with it. Two young girls observe the scene, one perched on a fire escape above and the other on her way home from an errand, both floating through their mysterious world. Essenhigh's landscapes are without a defined time or place, yet through their perceptual qualities they elucidate the artist's unique metaphysical universe.

Inka Essenhigh was recently included "Comic Abstraction" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; "Imagination Becomes Reality", Museum Für Neue kunst, Karlsruhe, Germany; and "Counterparts: Contemporary Painters and Their Influences", Contemporary Art Center of Virginia. In 2005, Essenhigh had a solo exhibition at the Salamanca Ciudad de Cultura Fundación Municipal, in Salamanca, Spain, with a catalogue including a text by Laura Hoptman. The artist has also had one-person exhibitions at Sint- Luks Galerie, Brussels, Belgium, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL, as well as at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland. In 2004, Essenhigh was included in the Biennial de Sao Paulo, Brazil, as well as the SITE Santa Fe Biennial, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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