

Lyndsey Marko *The Beach*

February 25 - April 13, 2024

A radiant mass of turquoise scintillates beneath ultramarine of the deepest stillness. Occasionally the color field is set ablaze by a stunning sunset, or framed by tendrils of palm fronds fanning in a gentle breeze; in typical examples from popular culture, a well-placed island blanches on the horizon, its sands whitened to peroxide gleam. Projected into every stock setting from screensavers to shower curtains to the watermarks on personal checks, this nameless tropical scene is always strikingly limpid. As a spacious representational vessel for fantasies of abandonment, isolation, and insularity, the picturesque seascape may be the quintessential contemplative image for the century of the self. In a spectacular new series of paintings by Lyndsey Marko, it is this latent psychological dimension that smolders—ambivalent to the catastrophes looming over her marine idylls.

The iconographic relation between island scenery and escapism has been continuous since the early modern 'age of discovery,' when European sensibility swelled with longing for private dominion, self-sufficiency, and the utopian recreation of paradise. Unending religious strife and political turmoil had shaped continental desires for a long vacation, and for those who sailed away to any number of New Worlds from the old one, the act of vacating one's known place in life was quite literal and enduring. The unspoiled beach in Marko's paintings, however, rather than figuring as an object of desire, is primarily the implied site of a viewing subject: here the fantasy island image is reversed to face the wreckage of past or portentous collapse. The perspective seems to belong, not to one expelled from paradise, but to whom has accidentally fallen into it. If uncertainty, foreboding, and perilousness pervade these works—so, too, does the pleasure of voyeuristic detachment. Meanwhile, what dread as befits a horizon of disaster is dampened and ultimately gives way to the supreme, penetrating power of oceanic serenity.

Fire, rising to heaven in towers of billowing smoke, moves in the opposite direction of abysmal, sinking water. Sensitive to elemental nature, Marko's luminous paintings reflect and perfect the symbolism of divergence between these opposing forces. Yet, even as cognitive dissonance abounds, the enlivening spirit in this body of work is a smooth, undulating rhythm between dramatic ends and new beginnings.

-Emile Mausner

