

The boundaries between the countryside and the city are less concrete than we often imagine them, the edges are blurry, and each reaches deep into the other. Dislocated spaces get filled with dislocated people, objects, plants and animals, that don't quite fit anywhere else. Agriculture decides, as best it can, what grows where, how water flows and floods, who eats who, but up close there's little order, either natural or man-made. What we think of as the countryside has always been idealised, landscapes painted for people who don't actually live in them, the smell of cow shit replaced by turpentine.

It's not a surprise that Šimon Sykora's landscapes are constructed, but the warmth of their colour and light might not make it obvious what they're constructed from. The places depicted are found objects, collected on travels and walks and from books. A small wooden house from an old school project – a gift because it was too precious to throw away – mixes with scenes from 20th century Romanian painter Eugenia Stănescu to make a picture-postcard village; magical-socialist-realism.

The people depicted are also collected, chosen for their lives and stories. The paintings, though, are not trying to tell those stories, these are moments of rest, not action. Positioned in these landscapes, the people are rarely doing anything, they watch us watching them, as we wonder how they ended up there, dressed like that. To

us, they seem to not quite fit, but there is never any discomfort in their poses. They are relaxed, fully at home in their surroundings, diffusing any tension that dislocation can bring.

There's a drawn out scene in Jia Zhangke's 2002 film 'Unknown Pleasures', where the character repeatedly stalls his motorbike while trying to ride up a mound of earth on the edge of Datong, an industrial city in Northern China. When he gets to the top, he lights a cigarette, staring at the tower blocks and the mountains behind them. This bleak urban realism shares almost nothing, visually, with Šimon Sykora's full saturation rural landscapes, but the protagonists are in very similar situations. For Zhangke's characters, their purposelessness is oppressive, Sykora's are allowed to embrace it. Taken outside of the city, it's a source of enrichment, even empowerment. At the end of 'Unknown Pleasures', one character is arrested, the other abandons his motorbike and hitches a ride out of town. The edges of the city are closer than we realise, the imaginary borders only trap us if we let them.