

Petzel

EMMA WEBSTER

That Thought Might Think

March 7 – April 12, 2025

520 W 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *That Thought Might Think*, an exhibition of panoramic paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Emma Webster, opening Friday, March 7, 2025. The show marks Webster's solo debut with the gallery and will be on view through April 12, 2025, at 520 West 25th Street. These new works are Webster's largest to date, and depict expansive, revelatory vistas of genesis and apocalypse. Painted amid the Los Angeles fires, her two paintings offer a front row seat into dramatic, fantastical maquettes of rupturing landscapes. Morphing light, space, and scale, Webster speaks to the precarity of the natural world and the role of artifice.

The artist's duet of paintings plays with a shifting sense of beginning, end, and causation. *The Material World* evokes a cool, Proterozoic majesty. Verdant with foliage beneath eclipsed sunlight, the viewer faces a front of cut-out trees, scraggly and bare-boughed. Meanwhile, *Era of Eternity* is a celestial rapture of a spiraling sunburst, with a flurry of geese cresting the canyon below. Webster casts tense atmospheres, placing her scenes in strange times of day, unclear if they represent daybreak or nightfall. Do these worlds unveil a beginning, a coming dawn, or the serene melancholy of twilight? And with it, an unraveling?

These two paintings are deeply rooted in the context of ecological crisis. Webster says: "It was surreal to make this work while just outside the studio; the orange, smoky sky was raining ash from the fires." Yet, Webster celebrates the power and resilience of natural systems, both surreal and sophisticated, through her constructed environments. They are virtual plein-air paintings of supernatural landscapes that do not represent real-world places. However, they are places which absorb the viewer, familiar yet not, further illuminating the complex entanglements of the Anthropocene.

To create her paintings, Webster fuses VR technology, penned sketches, and scans of hand-made sculptures. She translates her digital dioramas to the painted plane, integrating inventive means to advance the genre of still life. With both digital and analog tools, Webster expands on the rich history of artists commandeering technologies, such as the Claude glass or camera obscura. By building an entire set in virtual reality, Webster expands the planes of her enveloping paintings. Her landscapes take on an immersive quality, like a proxy for reality, becoming avatars of the natural world. The unsettling panoramas in *That Thought Might Think* intertwine the material and the virtual, where the bounds of reality become increasingly elusive. In an era where seamless technologies chase the knife's edge of sentience, Webster highlights the urgency of our relationship to the natural, the simulated, and the real.

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About Emma Webster

Emma Webster was born in 1989 in Encinitas, California, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. She graduated with her BA from Stanford University in 2011 and received her MFA in Painting from Yale University in 2018.

That Thought Might Think is Webster's first solo exhibition with Petzel, New York. Other recent solo exhibitions include Perrotin, Hong Kong (2025); Perrotin, Paris (2024); Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles (2023); Perrotin, Dosan Park, Seoul (2022); Stems Gallery, Brussels (2021); and Alexander Berggruen, New York (2021). Group exhibitions include Petzel, New York (2023); Max Hetzler, Berlin (2023); Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego (2022) among others.

Webster's work is part of various public collections around the world, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, California; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Florida; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, California; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, Florida; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio; Xiao Museum, Rizhao, China; Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China; The Warehouse, Dallas, Texas; and the Groeninghe Art Collection, Bruges, Belgium.

In 2021, Webster published *Lonescape: Green, Painting, & Mourning Reality*, a collection of musings on landscape and image-making in an increasingly digital world. Both this artist book and her eponymous monograph, published by Perrotin in 2024, are available in the Petzel Bookstore.

Petzel Gallery is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Karolina Chojnowska at karolina@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.