

Art Frontier Review | Arrangement of forms in landscape paintings as an ontological record of the artist

Michael Eade's solo exhibition *Past Is Present Is Future* presented by Fou Gallery

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Tree of Life Reflected, 2018, Egg tempera, raised 22k gold leaf, raised copper and aluminum leaf, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inch (122 x 91.4 cm)

Pine Tree Sapling (Small), 2017, Egg tempera, raised 22k gold leaf, raised copper and aluminum leaf on wood panel, 17.125 x 13.75 inch (43.5 x 34.9 cm)

Although all paintings can be viewed as “decorative”, it has become a harsh term since Conceptual art occupied a central position in the art world. Neither abstract nor figurative paintings avoid such an accusation if the arrangement of forms fails to engage viewers with philosophical inquiry. For a figurative painting to ensure its status as a

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meditative object instead of a background piece, it must possess allusive meanings in the subject matter, or maintain an overarching theme. The same strategy can be noticed in Michael Eade's current solo exhibition, *Past Is Present Is Future* presented by Fou Gallery, in terms of how his art is framed by a broad theme of creation, rebirth, renewal and the cycle of life. To better engage the audience, such a metaphysical narrative is also grounded in ecological facts. For instance, the ancient fruit forests in Kazakhstan are considered the genetic birthplace of apples, and thus entitled "Garden of Eden" while being endangered.

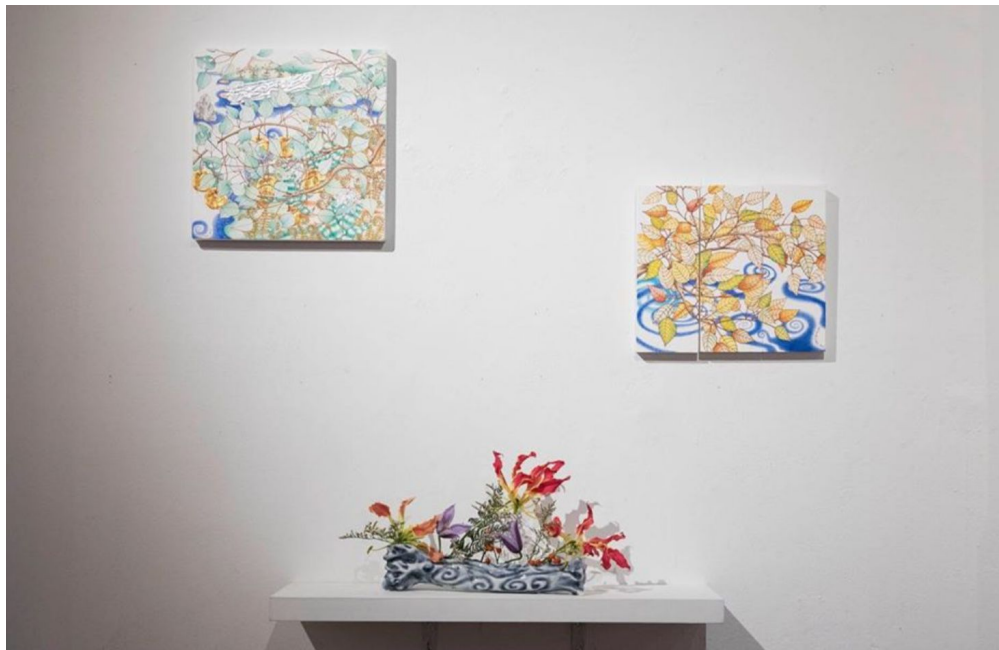
How, though, can those external references be related to Eade's artistic journey? How does the artist's internal dialogue with art, religion and philosophy inform his arrangement of forms? To answer the above questions, this article aims to develop a more effective narrative, to make the mechanism behind his form-making rise to the surface.



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Mount Tabor, 2019, Egg tempera on wood panel, 24 x 23.75 inch (61 x 60.3 cm)

The visibility of linework is a common thread through Eade's evolution in composition. Using nibs dripping with Venetian-red ink, Eade defines the forms by imprisoning the later-added colors with his precise linework. Like strips of lead framing individual pieces of colored glass in stained glass windows, the executed lines serve as the skeleton of his compositions. As Eade started to create ceramic pieces mimicking tree trunks in 2017, he naturally borrows the relationship between the clay body of a vase and the glaze on top as a metaphor to explain why he prioritizes line over color. "For me, the linework is the molecular structure of a painting," says Eade.



Eade's obsession with lines started at the beginning of his artistic career. Adding upon his four-year training in egg tempera painting in Germany in the 1970's, he was offered a print-making scholarship that allowed him to stay for one more year at school. His initial contact with etching surprised him by showing the aesthetic capabilities of an individual line, helping Eade understand its status as independent from all the other

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elements in a painting. Moreover, it showed him how lines could open up a universe on a two-dimensional surface.

Although the reciprocal relation between the line and space around it interested Eade from the very beginning, it manifested in his paintings only recently. What can hardly be ignored is the emergence of negative space. In *Mount Tabor*, while the complex enfoldment of space mostly happens in the compacted area, the sharp edge between the dense linework and the negative space carves out a moment of quick recession in these ambiguously sprawled out masses. The triangular wedge of white space centered in the painting provides an inviting entry into the surging landscape, which allows the viewer to notice a far-off hill revealed through the gap between two cliffs.

For Eade, the negative space weighs equally with what has been attentively painted. While his earlier works were heavily influenced by the collage pieces of Max Ernst and Jess, he distances himself from an inherent “collectomania” (Eade’s family has a long history of collecting art). “You just cannot paint everything. You have to curate it,” says Eade.

Eade’s reference to East Asian art traditions is not just a whim. Except for his recent interest in developing negative space, Eade’s paintings, from the very beginning, have avoided vanishing points, which serve to anchor the composition. “It is hard to make sense of a landscape that doesn’t have a perspective for the western eye,” he says. “I love that challenge.” When asked about his biographical relation with Asian art, Eade responded: “I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, which is full of Asian culture. My grandmother, who collected Asian art, gave me a lot of collection books about Asian art printed the 1920’s before I entered college. After I graduated, I worked in an antique store in Seattle. Asian art antiques are a big part of the antique world in the Pacific Northwest.”

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The continuous influence of Daoism and Buddhism paralleled the immersion into Asian art since Eade's early years. Raised as an Episcopalian who was once an altar boy, Eade seems inclined to structure his art around an evolving understanding of the intersection of different religions. "If we pull out from our planet and we look at ourselves, there is so much space," Eade describes how he feels galactical as he creates more and more negative space in the painting. Here, if empty space, functioning as a virtual space in the painting, does not intentionally connote a religious narrative such as Christ's resurrection or philosophical literature such as Zhuangzi's parable of "the butterfly dream/dreaming butterfly" (梦蝶), but does reflect a psychological "flying" or "lifting" experience.



Nurse Log Bridge, 2017, Egg tempera, raised copper leaf and oil on canvas, 22 × 28 inch (55.8 x 71.1 cm)

In addition to the philosophical aspect of Eade's formalist pursuit, the inclusion of a particular motif also reveals his renewed relationship with his subject matter. As a landscape artist who weighs individual plant forms as much as the overall landscape setting, Eade traces such an attachment to plantlife back to his childhood experience, stating, "My grandparents were extraordinary gardeners. They cultivated so many exotic plants." The turning point was in 2012, when he invented a kind of rainbow plant with sinuous vine-like stragglers. According to Eade, it is based on an Islamic motif shown on the tiles of a mosque that he encountered during his stay in Southern Spain years ago. "All the Muslim designs are plant-based, but the abstract version of plant forms. Figurative representation is not allowed in Islamic culture." Eade decided to bring this Islamic arabesque motif into his landscape paintings by returning the abstract design to its original plant form. Such a restoration process serves Eade's ulterior motive of empowering homoeroticism by rebelling against Islam's taboo.

"I don't want my work to be political, but I am painting the landscape, which is very symbolic. Why couldn't I impose more about myself into the paintings? There are plants that look like rainbows in the Amazon. It is rare, but it is never unheard-of [in] nature. Like people. I guess that's my association," says Eade.

It is hard to determine whether Eade treats the genre of landscape painting as an active site for expression or a psychological process for self-reflection. However, one thing is sure, along with his intellectual urge for a higher truth that transcends good and evil defined by human ethics, there is a significant amount of physical and metaphorical labor invested in using lines to open up a universe on canvas.

将认知写入形式：迈克尔·伊德的风景 艺术汇 | 展评

文/吴佩悦

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即便所有绘画都无法彻底摆脱其表面的装饰性，自观念艺术在艺术世界占据高位起，“装饰性”便成为了一个刺耳的词汇。无论是抽象绘画还是具象绘画，若其形式构成中所蕴含的巧思无法诱使观者自发地去进行形而上的思考，都很难回避这一指控。当作为一个冥想空间而存在时（而非纯粹沦为一个背景），具象绘画所描绘对象通常包含了对某些典故的指涉，又或者依赖于一个宏大的主题来进行叙事。同样的策略也存在于迈克尔·伊德此次在否画廊的个展“刹那”之中：他的绘画被置于一个有关创造、重生、更新和生命循环的大框架下观看。上述这一种忽然拔高的生命哲学，还不忘把一些更为具体的生态知识作为供思绪稍作停留的落脚，使观者有条不紊地逐级加深对艺术品内涵的认知。

然而，这些外围的素材究竟如何与伊德创作上的推进相关联？伊德对与艺术、宗教、哲学的思考，如何影响了他绘画时对于形的塑造、结构的安排？为了回答以上问题，文章试图将绘画的组织安排（形式）与伊德的个体经验联系起来，以建立一个更个性化的叙事。

贯穿伊德形式发展的，是其线条的可视性。用轻沾了红褐色墨水的钢笔尖将描绘对象的造型用线条确定下来后，伊德才依次在一个个独立的区块中填色。就像花窗玻璃中包裹着每一小块玻璃的铅制框架，伊德的线条成为了支撑其构图的骨架。“对我来说，线条是一幅画最微观的分子结构，”伊德对于他之所以认为线条应该优先于色彩做了这样的解释。

伊德对于线条的痴迷来源于其艺术生涯的开端。七十年代初，在德国接受完四年的蛋彩画训练的伊德，又被学院多授予了一年的版画奖学金。初次接触这一新的媒介，他便被蚀刻

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版画中线条独立于其他视觉元素的美感所震撼。于此同时，蚀刻版画让他发现了线条在二维平面上打开另一个更深邃的空间的能力。虽然线条与其周围空间的互反关系从一开始就被伊德留意，但一直未被呈现于他的绘画中。直到近几年，因为画面内负空间的大量出现，伊德对这两者间能量的协调与平衡才被直观地反映出来。在《塔博尔山》中，由于大量景物被压缩进入画面，空间的起承转合不得不缓慢且拘谨地铺展开来。而在密集的线条与负空间的交界处，却形成了一个供视觉进退的提速通道：画面中心呈三角形的白色块面，既提供了一个入口，让观者注意到画面深处的，从两座断崖间的缺口中微微显露出一角的、更为汹涌浩瀚的远景；亦提供了一个出口，让观者可以从庞大而复杂的景物关系的阅读中脱身出来，从而进入冥想的空间。

对伊德来说，画面中留白的部分和精心用画笔描绘的部分同样重要。如果说他早期的作品更多地受Max Ernst和Jess繁复饱满的剪贴画的影响，现在的他正在努力和自己的收藏癖倾向做对抗（伊德出身于一个拥有非常久收藏历史的家庭）。“你不能够把所想的全部都画进去。你必须像策展一样去权衡、组织、删减。”

伊德对于东方绘画传统的借鉴绝非一时兴起。除了他近几年才开始钻研的“留白”技法，伊德的风景画始终如一地避免依赖用灭点构图。“如何让一个惯于观看西方绘画的观众去理解一个没有特定透视点的风景画？这非常难做到，”伊德说道，“但我很喜欢这个挑战。”当被问及他个人与东方绘画的关系的时候，伊德答道：“我成长于太平洋西北地区，那里很大程度上受亚洲文化的影响。我的祖母做亚洲艺术的收藏。在我上大学前，她曾送给我很多相关的图册，有些甚至是1920年代印制的。毕业后，我曾在西雅图的一家古董店工作。亚洲艺术品是太平洋西北地区的古董世界中重要的构成部分。”

除了长期浸泡于亚洲艺术之中，伊德的创作也一定程度受到道教和佛教文化的影响。成长于一个圣公会教徒组成的家庭中，伊德童年时期曾一度是祭台助手（altar boy）。正因为此，伊德在艺术上的推进，一定程度上反应了他对于不同宗教间交叉和分歧的思考。“若我们将自己拉离地球表面，再回过头来看看自己，我们会发现，我们周遭其实有很大的空间，”伊德称当他在画面中引入越来越多的负空间，便感到自己与宇宙越来越亲密。在伊

德这里，负空间作为一个虚拟的空间，如果不是有意与基督教主耶稣复活升天的传统或道家“梦蝶”的哲学寓言相联系，也一定程度上描述了一种心理层面的“升天”和“飞翔”。

除了哲学层面的形式追求，伊德对一个特殊图案的引入也反映了他对风景画这一题材新的认知。伊德始终认为，对于风景画中单株植物的造型设计和对风景画整体构图的设计同等重要。他将自己对于植物的痴迷归于童年的经历：“我的祖父母是非常出色的园丁。他们培育了许多外来植物。”2012年是一个转折点，那一年他在绘画中引入了一种独创“彩虹草”。这一近似藤蔓的植物，据伊德介绍，是对一个伊斯兰图腾的改造。几年前，他在西班牙南部的小镇度假时，在一个由天主教堂改建的清真寺的墙面瓷砖上发现了这一图腾。“所有的伊斯兰图腾都基于植物造型，但是必须经过抽象提取。具象的图像表达在伊斯兰文化中是不被允许的。”伊德决定将这一伊斯兰图腾放入他的风景画中，并将其原本抽象的造型还原成为具体的藤蔓植物的样貌。这一修复还原的行为，一定程度上是伊德对于充满禁忌的伊斯兰宗教文化体系的挑衅。

“我并非想让我的作品过于政治化，但我始终是风景画家。风景画是一个极具象征性的类别。为什么我不能更多地将自我代入其中呢？在亚马逊丛林中的确存在一些彩虹一般的植物。在大自然中，它们确实很罕见，却并非前所未闻的。就像人一样。我想这就是彩虹草与我个人身份认同之间的联系。”

我们很难去判别伊德是将风景画这一范式作为一个向外表达个人观点的平台，还是作为一个向内的自省的场域。但可以确定的是，当他试图获得一个更高的智慧来超越那个被道德框架所限定的善恶对错的同时，在如何使用线条来打开二维平面这件事上，他也倾注了大量的体力和想象力。

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