

Michael Eade: past is present is future

By [Jonathan Goodman](#)

Michael Eade is an American artist showing at Echo He's Fou Gallery, located in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. The artists shown at He's gallery are mostly from Mainland China, reflecting her background, but the gallerist also shows non-Chinese artists, and Eade is one of them. Eade makes images mainly about nature, sometimes borrowing from nature in China (some of his images come from his study of trees in Kazakhstan and the western border of China). His paintings and ceramics in *past is present is future* make use of the decorative in terms that emphasize natural beauty rather than embellished surface, even if the latter is part of the scheme. Dense with tempera, gold or aluminum leaf, and copper, his paintings are so deliberately beautiful as to be otherworldly, poetic versions of their originating forms. They derive from a realist awareness of nature but do not fully participate in it, being slightly surreal extravagances inspired by the artist's affection for a delicate, colorful surface.



Michael Eade, Tree of Life Reflected, 2018. Egg tempera, raised 22k gold leaf, raised aluminum leaf, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. © Michael Eade, courtesy Fou Gallery.

Tree of Life Reflected (2018) shows an apple tree dominating the upper register of the composition, dotted with apples. The image is reflected on the small pond painted directly in front of the tree. In front of that is a group of wild flowers that partly obscure the reflection, while a branch of an apple tree hangs over the lower half of the work, entering without visible support into the picture from the right. The tree is based on Eade's research regarding fruit gardens and arbors along China's western borders, but, as the title suggests, the symbolic implications of an apple tree are not eschewed. In *Change of Season (Study), no. 1 (Triptych)* (2017), Eade paints on a small, three-panel field leaves turning darker in response to the changing temperatures, above a spiral of blue water, decorative enough to belong to a Japanese ukiyo-e sensibility. The strength of Eade's art lies in its ability to reflect nature and

culturally originated embellishment at the same time. It is possible to worry, slightly, about the romantic excess of these images, but then they exist in a place where excess is embraced. There is nothing feigned about their romanticism, which turns nature into the promise of an Edenic garden.



Michael Eade, *Change of Season (Study), no. 1 (Triptych)*, 2017. Egg tempera on wood panels, 9 1/2 x 11 inches © Michael Eade, courtesy Fou Gallery.

Pine Tree Sapling (Large) (2019) is a tall, narrow study of a dead tree with pointed nubs where branches occurred, and a good part of its lower form cut out to reveal the landscape and sky beyond. To the right is the sapling, a small form with green needles, behind which is another naked tree rendered in off white, echoing the sky above and around it. It is a strong picture of the forest revising and reconstituting itself, in a way that emphasizes the life-death cycle of

nature. Like *Change of Season* and *Tree of Life*, the painting marshals beauty to determine description and experience. (This is not so fully achieved in the small ceramic pieces Eade makes, which exist to hold flowers of his own invention.) The artist is strongest when he merges nature with art in his paintings, which do an excellent job of referencing a world that is increasingly endangered by human development. Implicit, then, amidst all this beauty is a warning: we are to preserve what is left of the wild, not only for imagistic reasons, but also for imaginative ones. The forest serves as a repository of thought and feeling even as it provides us with scenic beauty. Eade makes this clear.



Installation view: *Michael Eade: past is present is future*, Fou Gallery, Brooklyn, 2019. © Michael Eade, courtesy Fou Gallery. Photo: Nadia Peichao Lin.

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