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Shane McAdams & Christopher Saunders: The Fair And Open Face Of Heaven

January 6 – February 4, 2012
Opening Reception: January 6, 2012

Allegra LaViola gallery is pleased to present *Shane McAdams & Christopher Saunders: The Fair And Open Face Of Heaven*, a two person exhibition of paintings and works on paper.

The Romantic poets regarded art as the bridge between nature and man, elevating the emotional response to nature into an expression of higher meaning and imbuing it with the ability to capture a moment that has passed. Keats writes in his poem *To One Who Has Been Long In City Pent*:

To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven, to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.

Keats' contrast of the city as prison and nature as nirvana was the Romantic belief that informed much of the art of his time, and had its American painting proponents in Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, and the painters of the Hudson River School, who sought to depict nature in a Utopian manner.

McAdams and Saunders paintings represent the ineffable while offering a glimpse of the intangible: they are invoking a paradise in paint, though what is actually in this Arcadia would not be recognizable to the Romantics. The conceit of a landscape being a straightforward reproduction of an actual place is difficult to shake, though Thomas Cole and Frederic Church were no strangers to improvements and additions. So, too, McAdams and Saunders amalgamate existing scenes to create a world recognizable to us, yet distinct in their own realities.

McAdams' brightly hued topography references elements of childhood and experience both unique to him and extremely common: the South West and Disney World. The latter exists in a kitsch dimension that is transformed by viewing it as grandly luminous terrain. The eerily beautiful landscapes are reproductions of imitations, then altered by the framing surrounding these vistas. McAdams uses everyday materials such as PVA glue, correction fluid, ballpoint pen ink and resin, allowing these substances to take their own direction around the meticulously rendered surfaces of the landscapes. The disparity of texture, color and subject shakes us from our accustomed manner of viewing landscapes as merely attractively rendered scenery and asks us to reconsider what is actually natural.

This same tension is perceived in a subliminal yet forceful manner in Saunders' work. The clouds, though imbued with almost celestial light, billow ominously. Darkness snakes through each image, and though there is the sense of the sublime, there is certainly the portent of doom. The paintings glisten with an almost mirrored veneer. Slowly we are able to see colors and whorls appear and then disappear. Again we are unnerved from our usual inattention to surroundings and forced to reconsider the view unfolding in front of us.

McAdams and Saunders conflate nature, memory, process, abstraction and familiar images to construct a world which could be both the next world as easily as this one. As Mary Oliver notes in her poem *The Swan*: "the path to heaven doesn't lie down in flat miles. It's in the imagination with which you perceive this world, and the gestures with which you honor it."

Gallery hours

Wednesday – Saturday: 12-6PM

Sunday: 1-6PM

Upcoming

Sarah Kurz

February 8 – March 12, 2012