



Dreams and Trees

Peter Voshefski escorts viewers into a distillation of nature

MATT MORRIS // APR 22, 2009

Half the people I've ever loved have moved to New Mexico. The spirit of that place as it is represented in art is infused with such a longing as to cut me to the quick. (Except for the works of Georgia O'Keeffe, many of which just sit there for me.)

I've grown to be unsurprised when delicate, sparse, sensitive works that touch me deeply

end up revealing some connection to the Southwest. Artists such as Agnes Martin and Richard Tuttle managed to pack the tranquility and specialty of the New Mexican landscape into artwork that is discreet, unorthodoxly spiritual and clear-sighted.

The painting-objects that are presented in Peter Voshefski's solo exhibition at Aisle Gallery have similar traits. *Dreams and Trees* features installations of paintings and drawings on an array of surfaces clustered around shelves hung intermittently down the space.

Voshefski lived in Cincinnati before he moved west to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of New Mexico. He returns to present one of the most intriguing and appealing exhibitions that I've seen in Cincinnati lately.

Aisle has been on a long winning streak of great one- and two-person exhibitions, and this continues it. I am not the only viewer immediately engaged with Voshefski's work; I can't remember another local exhibition that has had dots marking sales popping up so quickly at the opening reception.

These small paintings are dreams about the natural world. Most of the incidents in the pieces are whispered repeatedly: Lightly administered dots of acrylic paint have been accumulated into hazy clouds that are spore-like and fresh. The work is not overworked. In one piece, "My Diet," mantras show up explicitly; a list of "potential mantras" inscribed across the face of the wood panel includes pronouncements of nature-worship and expressions of a man's awkward participation in that world: "pile of dirt, expand and contract, oh, shit, babbling brook, don't look now...."

Many of the painted wood panels that hang, sit and recline are "book dummies," wooden blocks proportionate to average book sizes with Library of Congress classification numbers, stickers and penciled text running along their edges.

"Encyclopedia" is one in which the systems of Voshefski's abstract painting run right to the edge of one surface to be met by library labels. On one "cover," a grid of pastel lines and dots is one of the show's most pleasant reminders of Agnes Martin's similarly distilled paintings. It is joined to the other side's blurry yellow hills by text and a sticker of a fish.

The conjunction of these formal and conceptual systems across the works thoughtfully throws man's ordering instincts into the perspective of the vastness of the natural environment. Taking a position on the interplay between man and nature, one of Voshefski's other pieces is titled "wehaveverylittlepower."

Two collaged drawings posit an additional vision into this exhibition. "Rio Grande Gorge: First Colony (Post Fire)" and "Rio Grande Gorge: New Crop Amanitas" contain depictions of the natural world in all its parts, surrounded by dreamy bumps of polka-dotted *paradiso*. Vertical marks that ascend above trees and rocks up to the clouds, which might be obviously interpreted as a purifying downpour, struck me later as related to the crisp columnar architecture of a city.

These works on paper might be visionary proposals for natural and imaginary additions to the urban environment. And isn't that what the show in itself has accomplished? Aisle has brought us an exhibition in which Voshefski's far-out bond with nature and his rich colorful imagination

find themselves close to Cincinnati's urban core, an enlivening contrast to the physical and connotative qualities of city life.

DREAMS AND TREES continues at Aisle Gallery (424 Findlay St., Over-the-Rhine/West End) through May 8. Hours are 1-4 p.m. Monday-Friday or by appointment via 513-241-3403.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13017440/dreams-and-trees-review>