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3 Dallas landscape shows offer an escape from the gray skies of winter

A trio of galleries showcase 20 artists from across the United States.



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Special Contributor

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Rebecca Shewmaker's ultra-detailed paintings of Big Bend National Park, part of the "Scapes" exhibition at Craighead Green Gallery, have an intimate grandeur that suggests a kinship to the 19th-century landscapes of Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church. (Craighead Green Gallery)

Pictures of landscapes, aside from their ability to convey a connection to a specific place, to give a sense of participation in natural, organic life, and thus to serve as an antidote to the depthlessness and placelessness of much of the digital world, are especially nice to see in the middle of winter, when the trees outside are bare and the skies are gray.

So I was happy that three landscape-themed exhibitions are now, coincidentally, up at three Dallas galleries, collectively encompassing 20 artists from across the United States and beyond. In painting, photography and other media, these artists, who range from veteran to emerging, provide a snapshot of the state of the landscape genre.

Willie Binnie's "Marfa" at Keijsers Koning presents a view of the far West Texas town best known as an art colony (where Binnie completed the present works in a Chinati Foundation residency), but here we see not the Chinati's pristine high-end art-world outpost,



Willie Binnie's "Super Harvest Moon" is featured in the "Marfa" exhibition at Keijsers Koning. (Keijsers Koning)

with its exquisite Judd and Flavin installations, nor the internet-famous forced humor of the Prada Marfa installation, but of something much more still and solid: pensive, ruminative views of spray washes, ice machines, border signs, Dollar General stores and cemetery monuments.

Curator Horace Ballard pointed out an affinity with Edward Hopper in Binnie's interpretations of the dry, dusty former Army base, which seems right to me, but I also see something more spooky in the eerily grinning faces of Binnie's snowmen, balloons and bootjacks — totemic, quasi-animate figures, whose vibe is more strange and uncanny than is Hopper's metropolitan solitude.

Two doors down from "Marfa," at Erin Cluley Gallery, "On the Horizon" pairs five Dallas-based artists with five others whose home base ranges from Australia to New York, and whose scale ranges from Zeke Williams' 20-foot-wide carved birch plywood *Denali* to Catherine MacMahon's 3/8-inch-tall thread-and-steel *We felt the earth crack*.

A number of pieces combine a highly expressionistic use of color with an equally naturalistic approach to drawing and composition. The strong colors lend the familiar-looking subjects an affective charge, in the tradition of Van Gogh and Gauguin, whether the cold deep black of Karen Gunderson's *Ama Dablam*, the fiery orange of Riley Holloway's *A Restful Moment*, the muted gold and lavender of James Coe's *Dopal*, or the pulsing, tempestuous red of Anna Membrino's *Grown*.

Two of the pieces, Antonio Turok's *Estero con pajaros / Estuary with birds*, and Gary Goldberg's *Finding the Universe in Oaxaca, Yellow Mountain*, give off an otherworldly glow. The egrets and foliage in Turok's work, although it is a photograph, have an unearthly paper-doll delicacy, while the skies in Goldberg's piece have an apocalyptic tinge. (I found it impossible to look at Holloway's and Goldberg's work without thinking of the recent fires in California.)



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As a landscape lover, I felt seen when looking at Nic Nicosia's wickedly surreal *Untitled Landscape #3*, in which a huge billboard depicting a rock formation in golden light looms directly over a tasteful bourgeois backyard, as though the homeowners were so hooked on their favorite vista that they decided it must be visible at all times — talk about a screen addiction.

Another landscape group show, "Scapes" at Craighead Green, according to director William Bardin, who recently took over the gallery from its founders, carries on a tradition of similar shows that used to take place at Dallas' prominent Edith Baker Gallery, several of whose artists passed over to Craighead when Baker closed around the turn of the century. My favorite aspect of "Scapes" was the spirit, shared by several of the artists, of a self-directed eccentricity with regard to art-world trends — a determination to do one's thing regardless of whether one is part of a "school" or not.

Patrick Pietropoli's views of Venice and Provence have a sweetness and elegance reminiscent of the kind of painted *vedute* (views) that aristocrats liked to buy on their visits to Italy during the Mozart-era Grand Tour — no sign of tacky cruise ships or fast food anywhere. Rebecca Shewmaker's super-super-detailed thread paintings of Big Bend National Park, the greatest Texas landscape, have an intimate grandeur that suggests a kinship to the 19th-century landscapes of Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church (whose *Icebergs* at the Dallas Museum of Art also happens to be a key inspiration for Willie Binnie, a Dallas native and Southern Methodist University graduate). Jay Maggio's electric trees are just fun, and have a pop-synthwave vibe that gives the retinas a good zap.

Having researched these shows online before visiting them in person, I shouldn't have been surprised, even though I was, by how different (for better and occasionally for worse) the paintings looked in person from their digital photographs. To slightly paraphrase Kipling:

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Having researched these shows online before visiting them in person, I shouldn't have been surprised, even though I was, by how different (for better and occasionally for worse) the paintings looked in person from their digital photographs. To slightly paraphrase Kipling: What does one know of painting, who only Instagram knows? The Dallas skies remain gray, but behind the gallery doors are dazzle, mirth and a free short trip to some of the best-looking places on Earth.

Details

Willie Binnie's "Marfa" continues through Feb. 8 at Keijsers Koning, 150 Manufacturing St., No. 201, Dallas. Free. Open Wednesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment. 469-961-5391, keijserskoning.com.



Willie Binnie's "Snowman" is featured in the "Marfa" exhibition at Keijsers Koning. (Keijsers Koning)

"On the Horizon: Contemporary Interpretations of the Landscape" continues through Feb. 15 at Erin Cluley, 150 Manufacturing Street, No. 210, Dallas. Free. Open Wednesday through Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. and by appointment. 214-760-1155, erincluley.com.

"Scapes" continues through Feb. 15 at Craighead Green, 167 Parkhouse St., Dallas. Free. Open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. 214-855-0779, craigheadgreen.com.