

Warning: Use of undefined constant SCRIPT_FILENAME - assumed 'SCRIPT_FILENAME' (this will throw an Error in a future version of PHP) in /home/kohnwo5/public_html/includes/navigation_top.html on line 1



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Fragile Horizon

Paintings by Daniel Kohn
Ute Stebich Gallery, Lenox, Mass
June 16-29, 2001

Daniel Kohn began to use the unusual format of these paintings while working in the World Views residency at the World Trade Center in New York. From the 91st floor the dense, flattened tangle of urban architecture, the distant marshlands on the city limits, and the sky and clouds were cut into segments by the long vertical window frames. The combination of height and segmentation had a curious impact on Daniel's perception of the horizon. Already broken up by the windows, it also appeared as the fragile border between the falling light of the land and the rising light of the city, between the static blue of the East River and the movements of the open sky.

The new work presented here goes further out – or in – turning from the city to forms of nature. Caught between the same vertical frames are shifting, fragile reeds or young trees and flickering shades of color and light. One feels invited to imagine that music or dance occurs this way. This is what I sensed when I visited Daniel's studio in Brooklyn and sat just outside the square he had drawn to reconstruct the room at the Gallery. As I looked from canvas to canvas I began to see a space for movement. I said to myself: imagine a large empty unlit theater, the rows of empty seats, the heavy lifeless curtains, the dim red neon of the exit signs. From a corner near a dark wall a dancer enters. She walks. You wonder if the rehearsal has begun or if this is pre-rehearsal, even pre-choreographed movement. She walks. She stands. You hear a door opening. Three dancers enter from her right. They walk in a loose line bending back and forth as they move, gradually losing momentum, direction. One stops, stands. Two continue, stop, and the first dancer starts again, nears them, leans against them. A light empties the floor of its firmness. Another light opens the ceiling. The dancers turn brown and white against swaths of yellow, blue, creamy green.

Daniel Kohn's sister is a dancer. Both grew up in India and France and have now independently moved to New York, the city their father fled to during World War II and which both parents left in the sixties. They come at a time of unparalleled economic expansion, of gross materialism, of global movement. How does one stand in New York? How does one walk? How does one's small verticality withstand the abstract monumentality of American urban life?

Last year Daniel's young son learned to walk. Now he enjoys letting himself fall back down if only as a pretext to sing, "The cows are in the meadow / Eating buttercups / Thun-der, light-ning / We all stand up!"

There is an emptiness – or an openness – in these segments of imagined nature. They seem to ask: how do we pick ourselves up from space? How do we hold our horizon? Our eyes catch a rough patch of color, our foot moves forward, outward, the body evoking ground as a right, as a given. One stroke spills onto another canvas and another, the passage of the painter's brush an invitation, not only to the eyes, but to the breath, the arms, the legs, the feet - to enter into the woven inscription of a human horizon. What tale will your steps tell? What music will your eyes play? Fragile Horizon, if you let it, offers license to walk in a world whose ceiling, whose floor we have long ago undermined and whose intermediate emptiness we must learn not to fill.

Lucy McNair
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