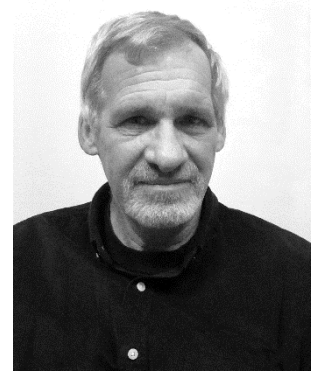




Adam Straus



TAKING NOTES: Works on Paper by Adam Straus

I have always enjoyed the more spontaneous aspect of working on paper and have used it through the years to work out ideas for larger paintings, but also regard them as standing on their own. It is a medium that lends itself to discovery and a more experimental process. The exhibition is a group of paintings showing various stages and avenues taken from 2005 to 2020.

Artist Statement

For going on 40 years, I have been painting my interpretations of the American landscape. For years, my landscape paintings, inspired by the Luminists, the Hudson River School, and Casper David Friedrich among others, were arenas for comments on contemporary man's presence in nature. Hopefully, not without humor, McDonald's signs, Gulf gas station signs, and other franchises would poke up from dark horizons. Lone figures would be seen often doing strange things such as shooting weapons into the air from the tops of glorious mountains. A group of figures, conquering a snow-covered peak would raise a flag, as in the famous Iwo Jima photograph, while at the same time being photographed themselves. The toxicity of water, streams, oceans, and water lily-covered lakes (a la Monet) would be represented by the paint left to drip out of the picture and over the lead frames which were often used as a symbol for this pollution. My work has always, in one way or another, been inspired by current events. Many of the paintings have been framed in heavy sheet lead or steel frames which come from my previous involvement with the use of these materials in my sculptural work from the 1980s. The lead also has a symbolic purpose. It is a contradictory material in that it is both toxic and protective. In alchemy, it is the opposite of gold which often represents enlightenment with lead representing darkness and depression.

Increasingly, in the first decade, since moving from New York City to the east end of Long Island in 2003, the figures have disappeared, and the narrative has been replaced by a desire to simply represent the sublime beauty of the natural world. For a number of years, I focused on the light, atmosphere, quiet, and beauty of certain places, many of the paintings being inspired by my surroundings here on Long Island. I feel a nostalgia for this more romantic vision of nature and hope that it is conveyed in my work.

In the last several years these depictions of natural beauty have been disrupted by certain digitally inspired glitches to suggest a more real disruption in the natural world. Inspired by the layout and symbols of the iPhone, in particular, the save, delete, and share symbols, these were added to a series of paintings of sky, water, sea, and land. I have also used an app called Glitch to send my images through and digitally disrupt them. I then paint with a loose interpretation of these images.

In 2016, rather distressed by the election of Donald Trump, I began to cover whatever surface I was going to paint on with newspaper both adhered and transferred as well as shopping lists, my son's drawings, and even rejection letters from the Guggenheim Fellowship. After creating this background of information, I would paint images of often cliché or classic romantic landscapes-- mountains, stormy oceans, our national parks-- over the news with the underlying information showing through in places. Occasionally, the image is further disrupted with digitally inspired glitches, stenciled polka dots, washes, and other headlines scrawled in graphite. They are my interpretation of a disrupted world, politically, environmentally, and socially, but at the same time my desire to paint away the bad news. I want to point the viewer in the direction of nature and away from this barrage of stimuli we have created. And, alas now in 2024, once again with the feeling that the world is falling apart, I am still working with the premise of providing a partial escape from the information and news by way of nature.

Basically, I have tried to embody everything I have painted with a passion for the natural world that developed in a childhood exploring the woods, swamps, and waters of my native south Florida and it is my belief that how we treat the environment is the most crucial issue of our time.