

SF Art News

“Subsurface Continuum ” – William Swanson

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William Swanson/ “Subsurface Continuum ” at Eleanor Harwood Gallery

review by Michal Gavish

Subsurface Continuum is an exhibition of new works by the San Francisco-based painter William Swanson (<http://www.williamswansonart.com/>) at Eleanor Harwood Gallery (http://www.eleanorharwood.com/Eleanor_Harwood_Gallery/Home.html). His new works of abstracted landscapes seem vast although he is painting them on small to medium size canvases. Using economical marks, he conveys images of extended terrains interrupted by urban elements. Swanson layers his seamless painted areas and covers his surfaces with perfectly smooth monochromes. In some cases he extends his technique to reveal his brushstroke patterns, creating color gradients and softening their edges. In the new series Swanson builds his compositions from sharp edged shapes of color, outlining specific landscapes of golden forest silhouettes, dramatic slopes or steep hills. He leaves much of his surfaces unpainted, turning them into foggy and flooded scenes. He then encloses these natural views by architectural geometries, interrupting their organic continuity.

(<https://sfartnews.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/michal-gavish-eleanor-harwood-1.jpg>)

His clean style gives an impression of coded landscape design where he assigns a color to each element, mapping events of architectural expansions over natural lands. But although his work is so meticulous, it is not lifeless. Swanson creates dramatic tensions in his architectural structures, such as the single lamppost illuminating a flooded road in *Terraform Floodplain*. In *Sunburst Radiant*, dark squares are accumulating to block the radiant sunlight from the forest behind it. Another example is his painting *Luminary Phase*, where Swanson constructs a multi-perspective space of excavated urban landscape against a dark backdrop. This futuristic archaeology exposes a series of radiant hi-rise structures flashing fiery light from behind a fractured derelict neighborhood foreground.





While his work takes a clear environmental stand, its strength is in its abstracted subtlety. Rejecting slogans, Swanson conveys his message by including the menacing urbanization in his peaceful landscapes. His abstracted shapes create a language that narrates the collision between the geometrical and the organic, leading his viewers to experience their unavoidable collision. The story that Swanson is telling us is not new. He is alerting us to dangers that we are well aware of. Yet the simplicity of his strokes and his concise

narratives are effective, when he delivers his important message through elegant quality. His new paintings become part of a long tradition of American landscape painters, whose narrative is currently shifting from romantic calmness to environmental anxiety.

The works in *Subsurface Continuum* are literal landscapes and abstract compositions at the same time. Swanson allows the two genres to coexist and even gain from each other. By abstracting his paintings he makes his landscapes infinite, while the abstract absorbs a narrative perspective, turning into an ecological prophecy.



<https://sfartnews.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/michal-gavish-harwood-3-s.jpg>

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at Eleanor Harwood Gallery, 1295 Alabama street, San Francisco

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