

# HAW/CONTEMPORARY

## Michael Krueger: See Be

MW Capacity, March 8, 2015



*Healer, acrylic, gesso & colored pencil on linen 30" x 20" (d.v.)*

From the press release for Michael Krueger's exhibit, *See Be*:

*The subject of the exhibition is rooted in landscape, and notions of wilderness and observation. The title, in part, refers to the act of seeing as becoming; meditative observation as a means to learn, understand and become. There is also a nod in there to the notion of live and let live, to allow nature and wildness to be, as the grateful observer.*

The truth is, *See Be* is far less a departure for Krueger than the press release leads us to believe. Krueger dips his toes into a new medium and new motivations. Longtime fans will be pleased, maybe only wishing for the appearance of a cowboy, hippy or poofy-haired heavy metal singer. It's a funny moment for an artist, this sort of transition, so I'll

stop here, and let Krueger speak for himself. *See Be* is on view at Haw Contemporary in Kansas City until March 13, 2015. Read the rest of the press release [here](#). More [Michael Krueger](#).

***You were a part of our Tenses of Landscape exhibit a couple years ago, how has your take on landscape as a subject changed over the last few years?***

Yeah, I have been working with the landscape for about a decade now, at first sort of unknowingly, and with the last few bodies of work with deeper intention. For my exhibition *See Be*, I started with a full-blown study into early American painters of the West: Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt, others too. However, it might be difficult to see the association in the paintings I made, for which they are probably much better off.

So... starting with Moran and Bierstadt and others of that era lead me to some pretty far out associations. With these early American paintings, I was interested not only in what they captured on canvas but the narrative of the expeditions, and how the images functioned in their time and

currently, and how we have come to understand or define wilderness.

When starting new work I keep as open as possible for as long as possible and allow the ideas, images, and visions to keep swirling suspended and funneling toward something unknown. Some of the other conceptual threads and image veins that made it through the funnel are, seemingly disparate visual and historic identities, such as; house plants, 1970's back-to-nature movements, the native prairie, bees, the moon, mars and rock-n-roll. I allowed my intuitive hand and mind to take over as much as possible, as a result many of these seeded threads are really unrecognizable. Again the work is probably better off.

*Wanderer, acrylic, gesso & colored pencil on linen, 60" (D)*



***Can you tell us a little about the switch to painting?***

The shift came partly out of necessity but mostly out of a curiosity and a desire for progression in my studio practice. I was working on large drawings and started laying down color and overlaying color with airbrush, so the first bits of painting started with the last batch of drawings.

I also realized that much of what I have already done in printmaking was a lot like painting or could be easily reimagined on canvas. For example if you have ever made a complex intaglio with aquatint you know that there is a great deal of painting happening on that plate, even though in the end it is

invisible. What is interesting about the kind of painting that happens on an etching plate is the intent and virtuosity is largely detached from the rigor and intensity of immediacy. A great deal of what happens in print pushes immediacy aside; I certainly leaned on these virtues.

When I was thinking about making my first painting I talked to my friend John O'Brien, who was at the time the owner of the Dolphin Gallery, he got really excited about the idea and offered to show me some paintings in the backroom of the gallery. What he showed me was simply the edges of the paintings, and I was enthralled. This reduction in what painting might be, or could be shifted my thinking about how to start and what was quintessentially important to me, that was a refocus on simplicity and making. In looking only at the edges of the paintings, not only did I fall in love with the

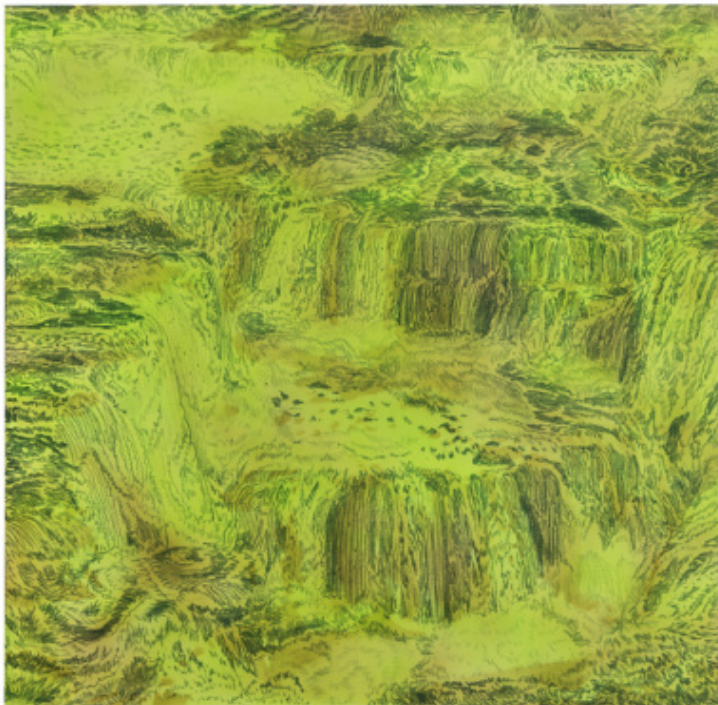
object-ness of the canvas, but I also began to see the process as a job. I mean that in a real 'blue collar' way, but also that the 'job' could be actualized in a million different creative ways. I am an artist that finds great meaning and worth in work, so I got to work.

Problem solving is also important to me, suspend your ordinary connotation of those words, and know that problem solving for artists represents not only a delicate negotiation of materials, but also a means to transcendence, transformation and association and connection – not necessarily actually solving a problem, as the problem in art making is often constantly shifting. As John Berger says in the essay "Lobster and the Three Fishes: *We can only use the word "finished" to say that we have arrived as close as possible to the drawing's own identity.*

The paintings themselves are totally brushless; I did buy some nice brushes but never picked them up. They are entirely made with rollers, drawing and airbrush. I knew some people would say that the work is very printmaker-ly, and I have zero problem with that, they are still paintings– in the same way a Warhol screen print on canvas is not a print, it's a painting.. and who gives a crap anyway.

### ***How has the medium affected how you work and what the work is about?***

If anything it was a kind of curiosity booster, and brought a shaky sense of invention to the process of making, surely these elements affected the outcomes.



*Waterfall Green, acrylic, gesso & colored pencil on linen, 35" x 36"*

***An issue that's forefront in a lot of work rooted in landscape is the idea of real experiences vs. mediated experience—how the landscape is actually a part of our life as opposed to what we know about from videos and images. It's a tangle. I think that's an idea that the work you are known for plays with also. How do you see the paintings addressing this?***

Honestly, I am not totally sure how to answer your question. I am earnestly trying to practice some detachment from the work, allow my intuitive self to be more present in the making, so while I have beginnings and

some social, political and personal investments largely I am embracing moving into the unknown.

I do know that color plays a large part in the work, as I gravitated toward a disorienting use of color, unnatural, playing day-glow and muted color off one another, sometimes psychedelic and at other



times rendering the images virtually invisible. This to me is very much about seeing- uncomfortable seeing and intensified seeing.

I also know that I feel an immediate need to decode the picturesque, to see true beauty again, to unfurl the wilderness and to unravel discordant understandings of the nature world. I hope to arrive at these ideas by creating simple images and complex associations. And in doing so create images that broadcast new memories– future memories–however like in a dream there isn't any resolve toward making sense of it all. And I think the work is ultimately positive and bright and offers the viewer a hopeful vision of the future and a means to a pleasurable remembrance of a paradise lost.

*3 Day Moon, acrylic, gesso & colored pencil on linen, 22" (D)*



***The press release says the work is “rooted in landscape”, but I wonder how much you view the work as a part of that as a genre, or outside of the genre sourcing landscape as subject matter?***

Much later in life, I realized that the prairie has always been a very positive and mystical force in my life. And that my childhood experiences in the Black Hills of South Dakota, function as portholes of understand and have through the years anchored me. Even as a young adult, I would often go off out on the prairie or into the hills for a recharge. Once on a winter night, while I was in college, I crawled across a long stretch of prairie outside of Vermillion, South Dakota, for very little reason at all and it didn't seem the least bit odd to me—of course no one else really knew, I was totally alone. It's absurd in a way but I just wanted the sensation of crawling on the land, stopping

and looking up, rolling around.

Since I have made the work and had some time to spend in the gallery some questions have come up. Questions that approach 'landscape' but also 'wilderness'. How do you see beauty? How do you see the landscape? Are you in awe? Are you disoriented? Are you bewildered? Do you see the rush of light blasting your eyes? Is the sun too bright? How do you reconcile the invisible, the vanishing?

***Okay. Thanks, Michael.***