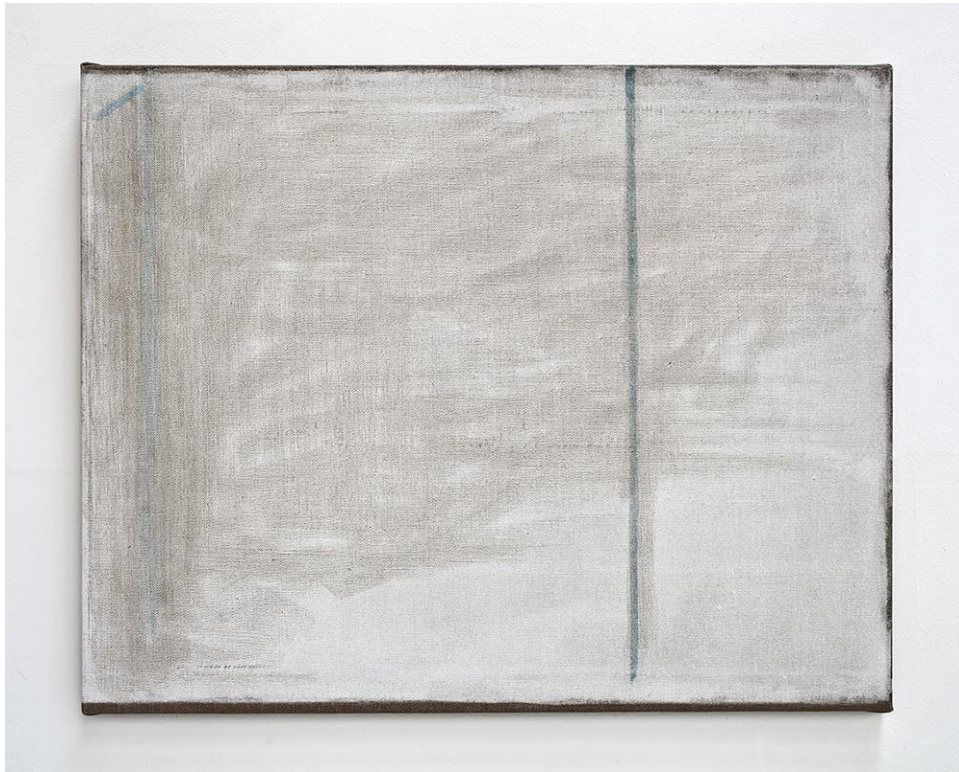


“Correspondances”: Evocations of Real World Experience in the Paintings of John Zurier

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John Zurier, *Afternoon (S.H.G.)*, 2014. Distemper on linen, 28 x 35 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

The title of this exhibition, *West of the Future*, makes me think of a passage from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*: "I always found myself in dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I could not say unless it could be that the morning came over the peaks of the Galbilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias." This passing of light and time together seems wholly apposite in thinking about Zurier's paintings, which so successfully evoke a feeling of proximity to other sentient beings through the elusive and transitive world of the senses. Each of the paintings here, varying in size and in a color range from greens, pale blues and varied grays, to

intense reds and dark resonant blues, need prolonged viewing, and extensive descriptions. It is more worthwhile, I have found, to describe a single painting at length and a further one more succinctly.

Afternoon (S.H.G.), from 2014, is a 28-by-35-inch horizontally oriented painting, made with distemper on linen, a medium consisting of pigment suspended in a glue, for example a rabbit skin glue. The extent of the actual painted surface — another rectangle a half inch or so shy of three edges — reaches around the left vertical edge, again, by a distance of about a half inch. This off setting of the white painted rectangle simply and subtly asserts the objectness of the support, declaring its role to be coexistent in the production of pictorial space rather than incidental or de facto. This not only avers the status of what we see as a constructed and painted object — distemper painted on linen fabric, over a frame of some sort — it also, whilst objectifying the picture plane, proclaims its capacity for spatial illusion. By incorporating a side edge, only seen of course from a viewing position that is not directly in front, a reading is required that involves movement and the realization that to truly see the painting it has to be seen not as an image of some sort alone, but as a surface bearing paint that has actual depth as well as a porous visual depth. The slight perspectival slope of the left top side edge is echoed by a blue diagonal in the top left corner of the composition,



Before and After Summer, 2014. Distemper on linen, 78 x 48 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

itself joined to a partially erased vertical blue line, that is in turn parallel to, two thirds over at the right side of the painting another blue line. Neither vertical line reaches the exposed raw linen band of the bottom edge, though at the top right hand edge, where the rectangle of white breaks and opens in slightly less opaque brush worked paint, the blue vertical reaches the actual edge of the painting. This area of lessened opacity reaches down through the painting from top right to bottom left — together with the vertical lines a slope of tonal variations recall a hill side fronted by leaf bare trees. Michel Foucault in his *Manet and the object of Painting* (2009), describes the kind of fixed viewing of a simply depicted space in Western painting, that Eduard Manet turned away from, a tradition Zurier continues: “It must also deny that the picture was a piece of space in front of which the viewer could be displaced, around which the viewer could turn, so that consequently he can grasp an

angle or eventually grasp the two sides, and that is why painting, since the Quattrocento, has fixed a certain ideal place from which and only from which, one can and must, see the picture.”

A feint white diagonal line adds further complexity to *Afternoon (S.H.G.)*, adding the illusion of a tilted plane receding from the vertical blue lines, which can, if concentrating on this diagonal slant, stand in as a human orientation against the plane's horizontality. The raw linen half inch bands at the painting's edge "frame" the "view," an evocation rather than a description, akin to Charles Baudelaire's concept of *correspondances* — an evocation of real world experiences through the invented world of a painting — an alternative to the analytic mind. Existential tensions between life and art are evinced by memory's capacity to move between what is present and what is absent. As the white distemper is thin it is consequently often absorbed and as it is worked in short roaming strokes it registers each particular woven, creased or knotted idiosyncrasy of the linen itself. This particular movement of paint, and physically proximate material can recall — with no rational relation — the vapors dispersed from New York's rooftop pipes seen moving sometimes against low, grayish cloud. The linen surface, whilst tactilely there, moves in and out of focus, against the brushstroked whites, hinting at temporality: A paradoxical and perpetual temporality in the paintings, as opposed to a momentary and actual one. The paintings in *West of the Future* are invested with Zurier's interest in Iceland — a place he spends time each year — with its landscape and light, but relate also to other lights and places for this viewer.

Pierre Bonnard presented not only a composite facture of multiple brushstrokes, but the psychological displacement caused by passing moments of time, returned as constant passages of time in paint. Zurier's, *Before and After Summer* (2014), a vertical 78-by-48-inch painting in oil on linen, is taller than head height and offers therefore two distances to view from when close, the variegated passage of brush strokes and abrasions from short distance

together with the sense of looking toward or past something when looking up. Dark greens overlay a pale blue, the blue more revealed in two patches adjacent to the painting's upper limit. Optically the painting's light level suggests dusk, of northern, rather than southern light constancy. Two artists that have been important to Zurier are recalled here, Bonnard himself, and Munch, though at some distance. More recent artists who come to mind, such as Raoul De Keyser or Günter Förg, occupy the borderland between reference and process. Zurier has combined thoroughly any influences on his process to come up with a singular expression for his own thoughts and experiences.

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Four Times, 2015. Distemper on linen, 21 ¾ x 29 ¾ inches. Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.