

MELANIE DANIEL CAPTIVITY TALES

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ASYA
GEISBERG
GALLERY



The Storm Clouds Gather, 2010, oil on canvas, 32" x 28".

Asya Geisberg Gallery is proud to announce "Captivity Tales", an exhibition of paintings by Melanie Daniel. With a stark combination of Canadian imagery, personal history, and a bravura approach to painting, Melanie Daniel's newest series dispels any illusions of Canada's reputation as stolid, placid, and afraid to offend. For instance, the painting *Prospector* harkens to the early French-Canadian *coureurs des bois*, or woodsmen, who acted independently of governments, engaging in the fur trade with the Iroquois in the deep interior. A bizarre sight of the titular head sits on a half-carved tree stump. Violence amid the imperious quality of nature is implied. Often, Daniel converts the myths and symbols of Canada's First Nations culture - i.e. the totem presented as a looming head in *The Storm Clouds Gather*, and the modernized kimono-shaped *Satellite Totem*. In *Kings of the Frontier*, wolves' heads impaled on stakes perch akimbo in a Fauvist landscape. Howling silently, or frozen open in death, they taunt us with the mystery of their meaning: who has beheaded them? What savage has committed this act? Are the wolves kings, or vanquished aggressors? What pilgrim has encountered this scene?

This sense of dislocation emanates from Daniel's position as a citizen of two New Worlds, each one a hybrid existence. Raised in British Columbia, with parents of mixed Anglo and French-Canadian background, Daniel has lived for the past 15 years in the bright hotness of Israel. In prior series, Daniel has painted both the landscape of her new country - warm tones, washy areas, Cezanne-esque male nudes representing Army reservists - and her birthplace - vast expanses of snow, inconceivably tall trees, humans dwarfed by nature, and elements of indigenous culture, all with darker colors, pasty patches of paint, and vigorous brushwork. With two distinct painting approaches, Daniel has explored both the outsider's perspective on her new country, and the expatriate's distant view of home.

Her current series, "Captivity Tales," goes back to Canada, this time with greater incomprehension rather than clarity. It is as if her new identity of mixed North/South has forced her to clear her own path, with equal parts symbol and invention. This series is more densely abstract, with lyrical snapshots. Indeed the way Daniel covers the rectangle with activity, an eruption of varying painting marks, hides the almost haphazard intrusion of the human into the field of nature and paint. Humans are a wispy presence, hard to see in the Vuillard-esque camouflage of pattern and marks.

Captivity tales were exaggerated accounts published and widespread in the Colonial era of settlers kidnapped by Natives. The narratives spoke of forced encounters with uncivilized and mystifying Others, and sometimes adaptation or conversion to the Native identity. As a metaphor for our incomprehension at a strange land, these tales suggest that even in our current climate of omnipresent information, our divides and fixed identities remain powerful. Within her apolitical universe, Daniel presupposes a simple acceptance that cultural hybrids exist. Neither pure assimilation, nor adoption, but powerful transformation prods the creation of these paintings. In the layers of discordant painting, incoherent figures hide in the fabric of the landscape. In several works, dotted lines weave throughout, as if Daniel is continually grasping at building borders and defining places, but the wilderness prevails, and obscures any human attempt at mapping. If "there" approaches "here", where are we? If there is no "Them", what would "Us" become?

Melanie Daniel was born in Victoria, and after studies in Canada completed her BFA and MFA at Bezalel Academy. With numerous exhibitions in Israel and abroad, Daniel received the 2009 Rappoport Prize for a Young Israeli Painter, with a solo exhibition "Evergreen" at the Tel Aviv Museum in 2010.