

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present The Beatitudes of Malibu, an exhibition of works by more than 40 artists and poets that respond to, depict, question, or are inspired by landscapes of all kinds. The exhibition is on view May 15 through July 2, 2021.

The Beatitudes of Malibu borrows its title from a poem of the same name by Rowan Ricardo Phillips; in the poem's eight parts, the poet engages in a series of encounters with natural, social, and aesthetic landscapes associated with Los Angeles, but also with the full spectrum of myths, narratives, and allusions these landscapes elicit.

Among the highlights in this diverse, multi-generation-spanning exhibition are new and recent paintings by Sayre Gomez, Jennifer Guidi, Angel Otero, Hilary Pecis, Mary Weatherford, and Jonas Wood; historical paintings and drawings by Milton Avery, Charles Burchfield, Jane Freilicher, Miyoko Ito, Helen Lundeberg, Agnes Martin, and Alma Thomas; and works by Huma Bhabha, Lauren Halsey, and Sky Hopinka that transcend traditional genre distinctions. A selection of poems by Gabriela Jauregui, Bob Kaufman, Ann Lauterbach, Rowan Ricardo Phillips, and Cedar Sigo will be included in a complimentary booklet published as part of the exhibition.

The Beatitudes of Malibu employs a broad range of approaches to the landscape genre by bringing together artists whose paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and poems are born of divergent—and often conflicting—legacies. Freely mixed, for example, are abstract and representational depictions of the natural and urban worlds. But on an even deeper level, the totality of the works on view juxtaposes a number of entirely distinct positions vis-à-vis the environments that make up a “landscape.”

These distinctions can be geographical and generational. For instance, while a 1930 painting of California redwoods by Millard Sheets and a 1966 canvas of a Long Island potato field by Jane Freilicher both present relatively straightforward renderings of their respective scenes, they are imbued with attitudes toward life and time that are palpably

different from one another. But in the context of this show, even the impressionistic realism that these two works share is an open quantity. Lauren Halsey's wall-based "funk mound," in another example, is a vivid representation of what South Central Los Angeles looks and feels like both in physical reality and in the heart and mind; its realism transcends the visual realm and suggests that landscapes have an internal dimension.

Other works acknowledge and confront the construction of landscape as a social invention. In mixed-media photographs by Sky Hopinka, handwritten text is etched around the edges of each image, offering reflections on what it means to be in relation to the land on emotional, psychological, and political terms; landscapes are shown to be places where individual human experiences intersect with larger forces, and where time and physical space are relative quantities. A painting by Raul Guerrero addresses the competing narrative strata that lie beneath the surface of any image of place, and pays particular attention to the ways in which Indigenous cultures, ongoing legacies of colonialism, and popular aesthetic forms populate the landscapes of the Southern California imaginary. "Toll Evasion" drawings by Michael Williams are made on paper supports that were originally citations for unpaid highway tolls; incorporating images of cars speeding through toll booths and their offending license plates, they are filled with vivid abstract patterning that flies in the face of the controlling acts of surveillance which gave rise to them.

Other positions in The Beatitudes of Malibu, while no less specific or personal, evoke the archetypal makeup of the human relationship to the surrounding world and open up spaces for formal contemplation. These include a luminous painting by Takako Yamaguchi in which subtly modeled geometric forms come together to generate a surreal mountain scene; a canvas by Etel Adnan, whose boldly colored, interlocking shapes suggest that landscapes are processes of cohesion and dispersal rather than static conditions; and a fiery picture of a tree by Shara Hughes in which the act of painting itself is revealed to be a generative force akin to light or wind.

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For all the many linkages that can be traced among artists and artworks in this exhibition, it is perhaps best described as a series of openings, each of which provides a view onto a different landscape with its attendant subjectivities and contradictions, its cultural antecedents and proposals for future interpretive axes, its natural features, and its all too human perplexities. In “Nave,” a poem by Ann Lauterbach included in the show, the speaker observes “constellations / sieving the night,/ equations/ distorting the aperture/ — this does not/ equal this.” So too the works in The Beatitudes of Malibu, which offer distinctions rather than universalities, and which, for all their historical import, remind us that the most immediate—and often the most urgently provocative—landscapes are the ones we perceive wherever we are, in the here and now.

With respect to the various interpretations of landscape by the artists and poets featured in The Beatitudes of Malibu, we at David Kordansky Gallery would like to acknowledge that our spaces were built and physically reside on the traditional homelands once known as Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, Southern Channel Islands) and home to the Tongva people—later referred to as Gabrieleño and Fernandeno by Spanish colonizers. We understand that acknowledging the gallery’s occupation on Tovaangar homeland calls for us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit. In all facets of our work, we remain committed to creating inclusive and equitable spaces by implementing policies and practices that promote diversity and sustain an environment of mutual accountability.