

Making the Landscape

Works by: Nick Archer, Carine Bovey, Claude Cortinovic, Amélie Ducommun, Sam Falls, Bruno Gadenne, Catherine Gfeller, Louise Giovanelli, Ken Gun Min, Asif Hoque, Tami Ichino, Jongwan Jang, Alex Katz, M'hammed Kilito, Sylvie Lambert, Sébastien Mettraux, Nicolas Party, Salvo, Fatma Shanan, Paul Signac, Annelies Štrba, Tursic + Mille

19th September – 7th December 2024

Private collection, Switzerland. Courtesy GOWEN, Geneva.



Tursic & Mille, *Cloudy Colors*, 2022, oil on canvas, 200 x 250 x 4.5 cm

the Impressionists disruptive characterization of light, the subverted use of colour of the Fauves, or even the shifting paradigms and ideas of the Land Art movement, the exhibition focuses on experimental techniques, encompassing the works of artists using new technologies in their representations, or those, for example, who immerse their own bodies into uniquely rendered environments.

The show goes further to highlight formal or aesthetic preoccupations, including colour theory, notably demonstrated in the works of **Claude Cortinovic**, **Tami Ichino**, or **Fatma Shanan** as well as the role of the landscape as both subject and background. Notable paintings by Neo-Impressionist **Paul Signac**, **Alex Katz** and **Salvo** provide an historical context for novel interpretations. The landscape continues to act as a vehicle for discourse on modern, societal concerns as well as global and cultural shifts, including climate change and the fragile, often perilous state of the environment and is addressed by several artists. Expanding this idea, the overcoming of the hierarchical conception of the relationship between man and nature is also echoed by the contemporary visual production.

Examined through rural or urban contexts, the presentation puts forth new perspectives on space and nature, and importantly addresses the role of background landscape scenes as a means for elaborating compositions using portraiture or in the animated landscape. Offering an inquiry into the complexity of contemporary compositional modes and techniques of the landscape genre, *Making the Landscape* aspires to capture some of the defining paradigms and trends of our time.

The exhibition takes as its starting point an historic work by one of the most important French Neo-Impressionist artists **Paul Signac** (1863-1935). Depicting one of the artist's regular views and painted in the most experimental styles of the day, *Paris. La Seine au Trocadéro*, 1903 exemplifies the use of colour and light developed by the artists of the movement. Signac's close association with Georges Seurat, from 1884 until 1891 became the catalyst for his exploration of colour harmony, contrasts, and Neo-Impressionist technique.

This autumn, GOWEN celebrates landscapes with an ambitious group show featuring over twenty past and contemporary artists from both Switzerland and abroad whose visual language engages with landscape, reimagining, and transforming the imagery and canons of the genre.

Making the Landscape proposes a reflection on the reshaping of the landscape from a genre often considered as minor in classical traditions to a primary means for artistic experimentation expressed through real or imaginary settings.

Persuaded by the certitude that many of the major revolutions in art history have occurred within the scope of the landscape genre, the show explores this category in contemporary art. Recognising the Romantics engagement with emotion, individualism and the drama of nature, or



Alex Katz
Jessica, 2003
Oil on canvas
183 x 152.7 cm

Private collection, Switzerland. Courtesy GOWEN, Geneva.

Claude Cortinovis (Swiss, b. 1967) follows the ambition of Monet's triumphant canvases with a largescale work, *Nymphéas*, 2023, shown for the first time and composed in the artists' signature style of manually constructed grids of thousands of small squares filled with different colours using miniature stamps. Interpreted as a kind of digital work that is made by hand, Cortinovis uses only primary colour pigments to achieve finer shades through successive layers of ink and pencil enhancements. Like performances, his works are realized slowly, calmly, in a scientifically ordered manner, accompanied by hints of moments that the artist seeks in the refinement of the detail of the image, meticulously parceled out.

Often employing natural motifs and objects in her paintings and sculptures, the refined work of **Tami Ichino** (Japanese, b. 1978) composed of inner intuitions and visions based on the observation of nature, leads us into her personal, semantic universe, often influenced by her Japanese origins. By using only the three primary colours together with white and black, Ichino succeeds in elevating her objects to reveal their metaphorical character and universal, evocative power. Further references to botanical elements appear in the works of **Sébastien Mettraux** (Swiss, b. 1984). Taking plants scanned during a trip to Thailand using 3D technologies, the works explore the representation of reality and the unpredictability of entropy.



Courtesy of GOWEN, Geneva. ©Julien Gremaud

Figures appearing in the works of several of the artists draw attention to the landscape as a milieu for human life, family, of exploration or an opportunity for personal reflection. Druze artist **Fatma Shanana** (b. 1986, Julis, Israel) demonstrates a post-transcendentalist appreciation for the environment, blurring the boundaries between her body and nature. In her drawings of herself, she embraces the rhythms of urban and pastoral surroundings, seeking her identity and creating a space for diverse self-perspectives.

American painter **Alex Katz** (b.1927) has long been inspired by landscapes, especially those near his summer home in Maine. Known for his large-format portraits of family and friends, depicted in his simplified trademark style, Katz often sets his subjects against atmospheric backgrounds to capture the intangible aspects of the landscape like the chilled air or a breeze.

Landscapes cradling family members by **Annelies Štrba** (b. 1947, Zug) bring intimate portraiture into natural settings. The subjects in the works of Štrba include scenery, sometimes animated by women with long hair or children in perfect harmony with nature, Madonnas, or flowers. Akin to lyrical or esoteric visions, her vibrant, unstable, timeless and other-worldly images, in saturated or overexposed colors, offer magical views where the outer and inner world converge.

The atmospheric scapes of French artist **Bruno Gadenne** (b. 1990), often featuring the artist himself, lead the viewer to less trodden regions of the planet. Personally travelling to remote environments, Gadenne's works open up disconcerting views into landscapes which physically, mentally and artistically challenge. Both primitive and uncanny, his scenes allude to primordial man and nature, or to the origins of humanity far from the civilized world. At times hard to decipher the time of day or night, due to the artists use of the *nuit américaine* or *day for night* filter, his paintings capture the blurred moments between the last rays of sun and nightfall, when the imagination slips into a pre-slumber state of consciousness. His works are also urgent pointers to the ephemeral existence of flora and fauna.

Swiss figurative painter **Nicolas Party** (b. 1980) is critically recognised for his familiar yet unsettling landscapes, portraits, and still lifes that simultaneously celebrate and challenge conventions of representational painting. Working primarily in soft pastel, an idiosyncratic choice of medium in the 21st-century, it allows for exceptional degrees of intensity and fluidity. His unique visual language has coalesced in a universe of fantastical characters and motifs where perspective is heightened and skewed to uncanny effect.



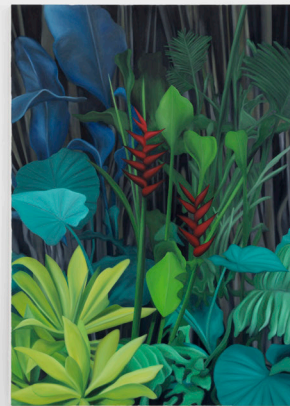
Similarly, the unfamiliar environments of **Sylvie Lambert** (b.1984, Montréal) call into question what is normal. Shaped by the artist's own heritage, notably her indigenous Canadian origins, her inquiries result in narratives which can be both humorous and slightly dystopic, portraying subjects which seem, at times, incongruous. The similarly phantasmagorical landscapes of **Carine Bovey** (b. 1985, Beirut) depicting endangered or extinct plant species are executed in a unique, experimental technique using cosmetics.

Three works by Italian conceptual artist **Salvo** (1947 – 2015) whose return to traditional painting in the 1970s produced the vividly alluring landscapes which have sometimes inspired Party once again unite the two artists (a 2021 exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Rome showed works by Salvo alongside those by Party and British artist Jonathan Monk).

Expanding the notion of landscape beyond the canvas, American artist **Sam Falls** (b.1984) is not merely inspired by nature, but works directly with its elements. Concerned with the intimacy of time, the illustration of place, and exploration of mortality, Falls has created his own formal language by intertwining photography's core parameters of time and exposure with nature and her elements. Working largely outdoors with vernacular materials and nature as a site-specific subject, the artist abandons mechanical reproduction in favor of a more symbiotic relationship between subject and object. In doing so, he bridges the gap between photography, sculpture, and painting, as well as the divide between artist, object, and viewer.

Crossing further into abstraction, the gestural works of French artist **Amélie Ducommun** (b.1983) combine original techniques with poetry, plunging into personal memories, drawing on nature, water, or other natural references which the artist layers onto surfaces, often using found plants, wood, or other materials, becoming an ode to grandiose spectacles, and to the natural elements that surround us.

Deftly manipulating light and form, the multivalent imagery of **Louise Giovanelli** (b. 1993, London) reminds us that the classical foundations of painting remain sources of delight and innovation. Keenly attuned to the historical significance of painting as a medium and system of representation, her delicate, intense paintings challenge the eye by dissolving representation into carefully crafted textures and patterns. For Giovanelli, painting allows for a visual slowing-down, and beholding her works is akin to a meditative process.



Multicultural and classical references abound in the paintings of Italian-born Bangladeshi American artist **Asif Hoque** (b. 1991, Rome) and South Korean artist **Ken Gun Min** (b. 1976, Seoul). Hoque's fanciful landscapes question his own aesthetic, acting as the backdrop for scenes which question gender and identity. Gun Min juxtaposes his characters against classically inspired backdrops, paving the way for the presence of his subjects, often drawn from the LGBTQ community within the history of art.

Jongwan Jang (b. 1983) depicts the endless anxiety of human-centred societies and modern humanity, which emphasizes selfish rationality, from an uncanny warm but cynical perspective. Jang's works combine colourful and seemingly lighthearted images with his acute view of contemporary society. The ironic landscape maximizes its kitschiness, often through the use of animal hide, symbolizing the human desire for salvation, the neglect of nature and animals, and imprudent, blind faith.

Since they began collaborating in 2000, painters **Tursic & Mille** (b. 1974, Belgrade and 1974, Boulogne-sur-mer) have been interrogating the contemporary overload of images and their relation with pictorial representation, questioning their reproduction, circulation and disappearance. Taken out of movies, magazines, media and the enormous repertory of data available on the internet, this boundless source of anonymous, preexisting material is used up and transformed into paintings. With their landscapes, erotica, portraits and abstract compositions, the duo blur pre-existing hierarchies between all kinds of images, aiming to go forward with the history and genre of painting as it exists in the 21st century.

Running in conjunction with **Swiss Photo Month**, selected photographic works by several artists are on view at GOWEN Storage, Rue Jean-Calvin 4. Remnants of man's intervention - here derelict or graffitied vehicles - in the compositions of French-Swiss visual artist **Catherine Gfeller** (b. 1966) and **M'hammed Kilito** (Moroccan, b.1981) remind of the 'push-pull' dynamic between man's actions and their impact on nature, a theme also reflected in an experimental painting on sandpaper by **Nick Archer** (British, b. 1963). Like a scarring of the landscape, these visible alterations to the land's original surface signal damage by human activity or associated natural disasters. Moreover, the symbolic presence of the car hints at a journey without destination, or the drawing of humanity closer towards something unknown. The photographic works of Annelies Štrba complete the presentation.

Loans from private collections are included.

