

Joan Nelson

22nd September - 5th November 2022

Herald St is delighted to present Joan Nelson's first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom, opening in its Museum St premises on September 22nd. With a career spanning over four decades, Nelson's resplendent landscapes continue her joyous investigations into this longstanding art historical trope, reinterpreting it through her studied and playful lens. At once embracing the traditions of her forebears, Nelson simultaneously subverts the genre in an interplay of happy accident and technical rigour. The exhibition will feature paintings on acrylic and wooden board, ranging from intimate to immersive in scale and all in the artist's characteristic square format.

Many of Nelson's paintings begin life as pools, sprays, and stipples of colours which harden into jutting mountains, eroded moraines, glowing waterfalls, and pulsating clouds as she coaxes vivid terrains out of her initial fluid gestures, moving between a feeling-based and a conscious approach. Others take an existing oeuvre as a starting point, in one instance Caspar David Friedrich's *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* (1818). Additional points of reference range from the eighteenth-century naturalist Ernst Haeckel to the California Impressionists and the Transcendental Painting Group in New Mexico, interspersed with elements from the artist's own photos, travel books, and views from her upstate New York home and studio. In contrast to her source images, Nelson's landscapes are eerily devoid of people. They instead imagine a post-Anthropocene period alive with sublime wilderness, long after the disappearance of humans has given complete agency to nature. Set in the distant future yet clinging to the nostalgia of a more romantic period, the formations depicted by Nelson straddle the realms of memories and foresight, and reference and imagination, with a dreamlike haze.

Nelson follows a legacy of landscape artists who strayed from visual truthfulness; Friedrich himself composed his paintings with fragments carefully chosen from different sketches, prioritising scenic awe over physical accuracy. Her invented phenomena are built with an apothecary of materials, including more traditional mediums such as acrylic, oil, gouache, ink, and spray paint, as well as cinnamon, baby powder, mascara, glitter, beeswax, and nail polish. These find unison in their domesticity, grounding the subject historically dominated by male painters within the feminine quotidian. The alchemic glazes, ghostly mists, and shimmering gradients coalesce on wooden boards and Plexiglas, with the translucence of the latter allowing the artist to work backwards on the reverse of the support and layer the front with foreground details, creating an additional dimension to the landscapes' perspectival depths. With multiple finishes from craquelure redolent of Old Master paintings to futuristic sheens, the works offer the eye a spectacle of terrain to roam.

Nelson's recent body of work lies in ecstatic contrast with her early paintings from the 1980s, which featured stark architectural environments in grisaille tones. As her output became increasingly vibrant, it retained its grounding within its historical genre as well as an ominous sense of mystery. With carefully rendered passages capturing the origins of her subject from European Romanticism to the American frontier, Nelson's paintings simultaneously find poignancy in today's world at the brink of ecological collapse. Evoking wonder and terror, the works exalt nature by offering a vision in which it triumphs majestically over humankind.

Text by Émilie Streiff

Herald St | Museum St

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43 Museum St, London, WC1A 1LY

Front space (Anti-clockwise)

Untitled
2022
Mixed media on panel
121.6 x 121.6 x 3.5 cm / 47.9 x 47.9 x 1.4 in, unframed
124.1 x 124.1 x 5.7 cm / 48.9 x 48.9 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8002P

Untitled
2022
Acrylic, shellac ink, pencil, milk paint, glitter on wood panel
61 x 61 cm / 24 x 24 in, unframed
63.5 x 63.5 x 5.7 cm / 25 x 25 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8010P

Untitled
2022
Acrylic, shellac ink, pencil, milk paint on wood panel
61 x 61 cm / 24 x 24 in, unframed
63.5 x 63.5 x 5.7 cm / 25 x 25 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8005P

Back space (Anti-clockwise)

Untitled
2022
Mixed media on acrylic sheet
50.8 x 50.8 x 1 cm / 20 x 20 x 0.4 in, unframed
53.3 x 53.3 x 5.7 cm / 20.9 x 20.9 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8004P

Untitled
2022
Acrylic, shellac ink, pencil, milk paint, glitter on wood panel
76.2 x 76.4 cm / 30 x 30.1 in, unframed
78.7 x 78.7 x 5.7 cm / 31 x 31 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8011P

Untitled
2022
Acrylic, shellac ink, pencil, milk paint, spray paint on wood panel
76.2 x 76.2 cm / 30 x 30 in, unframed
78.7 x 78.7 x 5.7 cm / 31 x 31 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8012P

Untitled
2022
Mixed media on panel
121.6 x 121.6 x 3.5 cm / 47.9 x 47.9 x 1.4 in, unframed
124.1 x 124.1 x 5.7 cm / 48.9 x 48.9 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8003P

Untitled
2022
Mixed media on acrylic sheet
61 x 61 x 1 cm / 24 x 24 x 0.4 in, unframed
63.5 x 63.5 x 5.7 cm / 25 x 25 x 2.2 in, framed
HS18-JN8007P

Joan Nelson (b. 1958, El Segundo, CA) lives and works in Stamford, NY.

Selected solo exhibitions include: Adams and Ollman, Portland (2020); Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles (2011); Robert Miller Gallery, New York (2001); *Currents 39*, St. Louis Arts Museum, St. Louis (1989); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (1988); P.P.O.W Gallery, New York (1986).

Selected group exhibitions include: *Say Less*, Herald St, London (2022); *Landscape Re-Viewed: Contemporary Reflections on a Traditional Theme*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1989); *The New Romantic Landscape*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Stamford, CT (1987); *Emerging Artists: Selections from the Exxon Series, 1975-1986*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1987).

Nelson's work is held in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis amongst others.