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Gagosian to Present *Idealism Is Unavoidable*, an Exhibition of Good Paintings by Neil Jenney in New York, Opening May 2



Neil Jenney, *North America Divided*, 1992–99, oil on wood, in painted wood artist's frame, 39 1/4 × 152 1/2 × 3 3/4 inches (99.7 × 387.4 × 9.5 cm) © Neil Jenney

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Regarding the change from Bad Painting to Good Painting, I had two striking realizations: 1, that even if I produced the worst paintings possible (Bad Painting), they would not be good enough. And 2, that "Idealism is unavoidable." And that, finally, Bad Painting wasn't my ultimate ideal.

—Neil Jenney

NEW YORK, April 18, 2024—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Idealism Is Unavoidable*, an exhibition of *Good Paintings* by Neil Jenney.

Balancing idealism and realism, Jenney's landscape paintings are highly stylized and rendered with a careful attention to detail. Begun in 1971, the *Good Paintings* are differentiated from Jenney's previous body of work, which he designated as *Bad Paintings* (1969–70) after curator Marcia Tucker's 1978 New Museum exhibition "*Bad*" *Painting*, which included his work. Painted in acrylic in a loose, gestural style, the *Bad Paintings* represent relationships between people and things, while upending preconceptions of connoisseurship and "good taste." The *Good Paintings* are instead exacting studies of nature in oil paint on wooden panels.

Jenney's *Good Paintings* impart the experience of observing the North American landscape at close range, in contrast with the expansive vistas of untamed wilderness typical of the historical Hudson River School. While describing the natural world, many of the works also remind us that the environment is never far removed from human intervention. Jenney's handmade black wooden frames are integral to these works, which he regards as "painted sculpture." Playing off the classical conception of a painting as a window into fictive space, the frames create an architectural foreground, asserting their status as physical objects. The works' mediated nature is further emphasized by the inclusion of titles stenciled in uppercase serif lettering.

In the *Good Paintings*, "good" is both a formal and a conceptual label as seen through Jenney's refined use of paint and color, and his approach to themes of universal significance, such as the artist's cultural role, climate change, and notions of societal progress. Depicting a sky without a horizon, *Atmosphere* (1985) emphasizes diffuse, glowing sunlight. Stretching over twelve and a half feet wide in a narrow horizontal format, *North America Divided* (1992–99) pictures a tree stump and bands of cirrus clouds together with a worn wooden fence, strands of barbed wire, and the remains of wires

and porcelain insulators indicating that it was once electrified. Related paintings feature divisions within the landscape, with fence posts, paths, stone walls, and other constructions demarcating space.

North American Aquatica (2006–07) renders a body of water in turbulent brushstrokes of deep blue and white, inspired by Baltic currents. *North American Summer* (2019–20) presents the forms of a maple tree's leaves and branches against a background of mottled brushstrokes in brown and bright green that suggest a manicured lawn, the composition's striking vantage point establishing contrast between its natural and artificial aspects. With a sense of subjectivity that verges on the mythological, the *Good Paintings* convey the coexistence of their subjects in both the real and the imagined world.

Neil Jenney was born in 1945 in Torrington, Connecticut, and lives and works in New York. Collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark; and Tate, London. Solo exhibitions include *Paintings and Sculpture 1967–1980*, University of California Art Museum, Berkeley (1981, traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark; and Kunsthalle Basel); *Collection in Context—Neil Jenney: Natural Rationalism*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1994); and *North America*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2007). Jenney's work has been featured in major group exhibitions and biennials, including the Whitney Biennial (1969, 1973, 1981, and 1987); *Representations of America* (1977–78, organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for the Pushkin Museum, Moscow; Hermitage, Saint Petersburg; and Palace of Art, Minsk, Belarus); *New Image Painting*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1978); and *"Bad" Painting*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1978).

#NeilJenney

NEIL JENNEY

Idealism Is Unavoidable

Opening reception: Thursday, May 2, 6–8pm

May 2–June 22, 2024

541 West 24th Street, New York

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