



《製作的方法》 | *The Means That Make*, 2025. 亞麻布面油畫 | Oil on linen. 152.4 × 213.4 cm. 圖片提供：藝術家與貝浩登 | Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. 攝影 | Photo: Marten Elder.

Emma Webster

Vapors

March 25 – May 17, 2025

Perrotin is pleased to present *Vapors*, an exhibition of paintings by British-American artist Emma Webster, marking her solo debut in Hong Kong. It opens on Tuesday, March 25, 2025. The 11 canvases, painted during the Los Angeles fires this January, show ethereal, empty landscapes imbued with an unsettling, atmospheric calm. Some paintings suggest the arrival of unfathomable calamity, while others impart the cool surrender of catastrophic aftermath. In these works, Webster invents a wholly new genre of painting that blurs the boundaries between plein-air landscape, still-life, and virtual reality.

Last year, California—where the artist currently works and resides—experienced a record-breaking dry season, which ultimately contributed to the recent wildfire in LA, wiping out entire ecosystems and neighborhoods. The world watched online as Pacific Palisades, the neighborhood where Webster's maternal family is from, burned to the ground. Despite the urgency to reverse climate change, efforts remain focused on mitigating symptoms instead of resolving the causes. This tragic complacency and surrender to illusion seep into *Vapors*.

For Webster, the state of the climate is existential. Working during the devastating wildfires near her studio, she was reminded of the nightmarish global pandemic—wearing masks, doom-scrolling the news, on the prowl for air purifiers, learning of losses from friends and

艾瑪·韋伯斯特

浮煙

2025年3月25日 – 5月17日

英裔美籍藝術家艾瑪·韋伯斯特在貝浩登（香港）舉辦的首次個展「浮煙」中，展出了十一幅最新油畫作品，帶領觀眾踏上一段穿越詭異自然景觀的旅程。這些作品或投射著難以預測的災難降臨前的憂慮，或承受着大自然憤怒的餘波。延續了藝術家對風景繪畫在21世紀如何發展的廣泛探索，這些作品反映了數碼科技領域對自然與實體世界的侵蝕，同時模糊了風景、靜物與肖像之間的界限。

韋伯斯特自將創作專注於風景繪畫以來，從不曾再現現實中的自然景色。這一選擇部分源於她在南加州溫帶恒定的氣候中成長，目睹了現實自然與好萊塢和迪士尼電影中描繪的田園風光，甚至壯麗景觀之間的差距；此外，在探索這一主題悠久歷史的過程中，她意識到，對自然的呈現更多是一種人為的構建，而非真實的再現。

風景畫在16世紀被構想為「關於自然的圖畫」，自然即風景，自然同理也被理解為圖像。這意味著純粹的人類視角構思了非人類的世界，土地成為人類行動、感知甚至物質剝削的舞台。隨著風景畫作為一種藝術流派的興起，儘管描繪自然的方式得以推進，但人類的力量也以威脅世界的方式改變了自然，使其不再適合人類居住。換句話說，人類或神的行動才是核心，而非事件發生的地點。

然而，這個地點始終是人類自文明誕生以來唯一居住的母星地球。在環境破壞與科技驅動的人類力量的侵襲下，地球早已超過生態平衡的



《林邊》| *Woodside*, 2025. 亞麻布面油畫 | Oil on linen. 243.8 × 182.9 cm. 圖片提供：藝術家與貝浩登 | Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. 攝影 | Photo: Marten Elder.

family. All of it exacerbated by an antithetical bewilderment: *What can be done?* Reflecting on the experience, Webster describes the uncomfortable banality of daily life, stalled and suspended, despite the terrible and profound disaster outside. This sense of lost gravity is apparent in every painting.

Vapor, a natural ghostly phenomenon of suspended liquid in the air, is often a fleeting result of change: temperature, atmosphere, weather, and environment. Moreover, vapor is barely perceptible to the human eye and is most often associated with breath. It is the moment when our inner and outer worlds collide. "To have the vapors" connotes melancholic humor—it was a term to describe feeling depressed or emotionally "under the weather." Vapor's ethereal, transient, and transformative qualities, both in nature and metaphorical dimensions, ring in the paintings' misty greys and thin glazed brushstrokes.

Much like the lineage of landscape painting itself, Emma Webster does not reproduce vistas from real life, but cobbles together worlds to paint from. Landscape in the sixteenth century was first conceived as background and then came to signify scenery. Depictions of nature were conceived from a purely human vantage point as a stage set for human actions, perceptions, and material exploitations. As the industrial revolution inspired a pastoral exodus, man set to carving the landscape to suit his whims. Human agency transformed nature in ways that would come to threaten it; the effects of which we are forced to contend with now.

Webster first adopted sculpture studies as means of creating spatial realism in her paintings. This germination began when she briefly worked in set design before furthering her studies at Yale Graduate School. Her hybrid creative process involves making sculptures both in and outside of the computer. She crafts objects with wax and plaster, then 3D-scans them, and integrates them into her digital dioramas. Using the computer, she combines VR elements with sophisticated light rendering, which she then projects and paints onto canvas. Webster's workflow is porous. As these virtual and physical worlds change hands, boundaries are reimagined, and spectators are encouraged to question what is real and what is fantasy.



《阿拉斯加》| *Alaska*, 2025. 亞麻布面油畫 | Oil on linen. 213.4 × 152.4 cm. 圖片提供：藝術家與貝浩登 | Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. 攝影 | Photo: Marten Elder.

臨界點。2024年，內華達州及韋伯斯特工作與居住的加州部分地區經歷了破紀錄的乾旱季節，最終引發了洛杉磯的野火，燒毀了整個生態系統與社區。而網民們則在社交媒體上觀望，懷疑好萊塢的標誌是否已化為灰燼。儘管亟需扭轉對生態系統的破壞，人類仍以推測的方式預測氣候變化，將未來描繪得如同幻影。

韋伯斯特將繪畫視為一種改編與構演，使真實與虛構共存並相互轉化。鑒於風景畫的歷史機遇，這一想法在她於耶魯大學研究生院深造前從事佈景設計時便開始生根發芽。這段經歷讓她相信，風景也可以像戲劇般「佈景」，人類中心主義的困境可以被改編為虛幻的現場或景觀。

藝術家出其不意地將展覽命名為「浮煙」，而作品中則沒有一件直接描繪了煙霧。煙霧作為一種自然現象，懸浮、擴散、隨著如溫度或氣壓等環境條件的變化而轉變。此外，浮煙只有在風力和光照等環境因素變化的情況下才能被人眼察覺。因此，它作為大氣條件變化的度量 and 表現形式，與展覽作品的內涵不謀而合。煙霧的虛無縹緲、瞬息萬變，無論在本義還是隱喻層面，都與藝術家創作時的共鳴相契合。

創作這一系列作品時，韋伯斯特工作室附近正遭受野火塗炭。令她震驚的不僅是災難讓人回想起全球大流行病的噩夢——戴口罩、從親友口中得知傷亡，還有一種末日與陰霾感，以及在應對這種情況時的茫然，「戰或逃」，人性本能應激反應的缺失令人困惑。儘管事態嚴重，許多人仍在庸常的生活中停滯不前，仿佛被懸置在其中。這種失去重心的感覺悄然體現在每幅作品中。

在這些描繪無人之地的畫作中，以飛翔為本能的鳥類呈現靜止姿態，暗示了它們不自然甚至危險的處境。例如，《阿拉斯加》中的禿鷹與雛鳥棲息在樹枝上；紅雀懸在昏暗背景前的半空；癯瘦的天鵝似乎喪失了形體，倒在一座石碑下；甚至連笨重的黑鳥也有著哥斯拉般的體型，失去了從灼熱的沙漠中起飛的意志。動物龐大的體積佔據了這些畫面的大部分構圖，讓人聯想到浪漫主義時代的肖像風格。同時，石膏表面及3D成像的立體感也暗示了它們在這些虛構場景中可能扮演的神話角色。

Using digital prosthetics such as the Oculus and Blender, Webster is among the first artists of her generation to repurpose these tools for painting. From orchestrating gestural sweeps to painstakingly fine-tuning minute details, her pictures lull the spectator with their phantasmagoric and painterly delight.

In these paintings of no man's land, birds—whose instinct is to fly—are portrayed in static postures, implying their unnatural, even dire circumstances. In *Alaska*, a calcified vulture is perched and stiff; the *Sparrow* is pinned in mid-air; *Odette*, an abstracted swan, part-drawing part-frame sits under a dolmen; even the bulky *Black Bird* with a Mooresque musculature is weighted, planted in a desolate vista. What these paintings have in common is also the dominating physical presence of the singular animal, occupying a large portion of the image, bringing to mind portraiture in the Romantic era. Meanwhile, their mythical personas are suggested by the visual features of taffy surfaces and the eerie dimensionality of 3D rendering.

Unlike most of Webster's terrains and vegetation, which are "grown" digitally using the Oculus, the shrubs in *Brushwood* are adapted from 3D scans of a bonsai tree. Already an artificial form of nature that has been manipulated and controlled, the bonsai scan amplifies its digital glitches, further heightening its falsities. Additionally, its scale inversion transforms it from miniature to giant. The tree is illuminated by a dramatic radiance, similar to the golden beams around the sacrificial lamb in Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. Its swept, tendril branches sway in invisible tumult. The winds of change are not always placid.

Evolving from the sci-fi terrains of *Illuminarium*, her first show with Perrotin, Webster here opts for stark, refined compositions, where vastness is hard not to conflate with loneliness. *Woodside*, named after the street of her childhood home, also literally means the wood left on the side. In both interpretations, the forest is "placed." The sun is painted between the trees and their shadows, using techniques similar to *sfumato*, pioneered by greats such as Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin. Contradicting light sources create unusual, improbable scenes where the long-cast shadows are oddly illuminated.

The Means That Make, portraying a solemn clover with an expansive sail above, introduces a new spiritual discourse in her work. Like the visionary spiritualist painters William Blake, Frederic Church, and Agnes Pelton, Webster uses light to speak to the spirit. The luminous crack of the horizon resembles a seam splitting open into the beyond. Within it, we find an omnipresent breath, equal parts invocation and revelation.

Emma Webster's practice mirrors the soul-searching of our zeitgeist, in which we must contend with both our environmental impact and AI sentience. The ground shifts beneath us; the bonsai becomes behemoth; the mountain, molehill. The winds change course. We inhale, we exhale. We call out, the vapor of our breath our only trace.

Edited based on text by Fiona He Xiao

韋伯斯特在繪畫創作中採用雕塑這一美學工具，為畫面提供了空間感，也是藝術家在虛構中呈現真實性的一種手法。她混合手工與科技的創作過程，包括使用蠟和石膏製作雕塑，對其進行掃描，再將數碼影像與電腦軟件整合，並在合成畫稿中生成如同舞台般的光影關係，最終轉換到畫布上。這些虛擬世界與實體世界的轉換、互動與整合，突顯了次元界限的流動性，鼓勵觀眾質疑何謂真實、何謂虛構。此外，Oculus和Blender等數碼虛擬裝置也讓藝術家的心靈劇場更顯生動。從編排大幅度的動態揮灑到精心調整微小的細節，韋伯斯特的作品以其夢幻般的魅力和繪畫所帶來的純粹欣悅，引導觀者沉浸其中。

與韋伯斯特使用Oculus生成的多數地形與植被不同，《矮林》中的灌木由真實盆景的3D掃描改編而成，「盆景」本就是被人為操控和改造的人工自然，這種人類對美的理想追求，協同掃描結果中的數碼瑕疵，被進一步人工化。同時，藝術家捕捉其實體經驗也提升了矮木叢的真實感。盆景的倒置比例，從微型變為高聳的巨型，並由仿若揚·凡·艾克在《神秘羔羊之愛》中金色光束的戲劇性光芒照亮，激發出某種令人肅然起敬的時刻。在無聲、無形的風中，捲曲的枝條漫無目標地搖擺，突顯了極端氣候甚至某種社會狀況。

繪畫作為舞台的概念進一步延伸至一系列大尺寸的樹木畫作中。與首次個展「Illuminarium」中的森林交錯與地形變遷不同，韋伯斯特選擇了更精緻、近乎直觀的構圖，在廣闊原野上點綴單顆或小叢樹木。以《林邊》為例，畫作以藝術家童年住所的街道命名，或在字面上明指擱置于一旁的木頭，可能暗示人類過度砍伐森林等現狀。儘管前景樹木與後方陰影之間看似隔著遼闊空間，但樹木在穩定畫面中展現出力量與韌性。雖然懸於樹木與樹影間的太陽使用了類似暈塗法的技巧——在許多偉大畫家（如克勞德·洛蘭與尼古拉·普桑等）的風景畫中都可見到——韋伯斯特卻讓光源彼此競爭，將虛構的呈現方式與歷史風景畫的理想模型互相參照。

韋伯斯特深知繪畫和戲劇中的光線具有捕捉觀眾目光的功能，因此她精巧地為畫面製造光感，這些點亮的位置不僅令觀眾產生好奇，也賦予其敬畏與莊重感。與此同時，畫面的光感認知建立了清晰的圖層，以及前景與背景之間的關係。例如《山中密林》的前景暗淡，暗示眼前的朦朧，而將亮度放置於空間深處，遠高於聳立的樹木，廓清了某種莊嚴乃至神聖的場景。在《晚霞》中，荒蕪的樹木露出樹皮，看起來像是被石化了一樣，畫面左側的強大光源讓人聯想到原子彈爆炸的情景。然而，兩叢樹木屹立不倒，攜帶著世界末日時的無助與哀傷。

《製作的方法》描繪一株小小的三葉草及其廣闊的陰影，以崇高感引發對靈性的討論。作品構圖中對光線與比例的使用，讓人聯想到威廉·布雷克和弗雷德里克·丘奇等先知畫家似曾相識的畫面。與這些超驗畫家的願景不同，韋伯斯特在背景底部放置了一束強光，賦予三葉草的陰影一種肅穆甚至帶有威脅性的氣勢。

艾瑪·韋伯斯特的創作描繪了當代人類直面科技與環境衝擊的時刻。她的繪畫作品以「舞台」排演虛構場景，以科技參與的人工視角，迫使人類反思自身所棲居的世界的實際狀況，以及在推動改變時的能動性。正如展覽標題所暗示的，改變與轉型是當下的常態。

撰文：賀瀟

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