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Introduction to *Smoggy Abstraction : Recent Los Angeles Painting*

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Introduction

The urban landscape, whether viewed with the serenity found in El Greco's View of Toledo (c.1600) or in the tumultuous mode of Ludwig Meidner's Apocalyptic Landscape (1913), has fascinated artists through the ages. James Scarborough's exhibition Smoggy Abstraction: Recent Los Angeles Painting represents a poignant attempt by contemporary artists to come to terms with a late twentieth-century urban environment. In this instance, the exhibition has a double edge. It reflects the efforts of a group of younger Los Angeles artists to address the turbulent post-riot vitality of a city that exudes creative opportunities and at the same time portends disaster, whether natural or social.

Concurrently, this exhibition shows the artists engaged in the century-long debate concerning abstraction and figuration endemic to painting itself. Such an undertaking is not without risk for the artists, as it might have turned out that they had little to add to an already extended art historical debate. Scarborough achieves a curatorial triumph by showing how the artists in this exhibition fruitfully bring the two issues together. While working on solutions to the painterly problems of abstraction and figuration, they also provide visual metaphors that address the matter of human presence and survival in a media-driven, often threatening, and impersonal urban space.

Such an undertaking warrants commendation, both for its curatorial vision, and for the cooperative efforts that it represents. It has required the generosity of the artists as lenders and also the support of collector Heidi Steiger of New York. The staff members at Margo Leavin Gallery, Christopher Grimes Gallery, and Bennett Roberts Fine Art were indispensable to this effort. Finally, the exhibition could not have gone forward without the collaborative efforts of the entire Haggerty Museum staff who worked diligently toward making it a success.

Curtis L. Carter
Director

Smoggy Abstraction: Recent Los Angeles Painting

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