



See Nicolsa, Real Picture #12, 1988, 79" x 48"

"NATURE/nature," Gallery 400/The University of Illinois/Chicago, 1 March-6 April

By Corey Postiglione

"NATURE/nature," an exhibition curated by Karen Ineck and Linda King addresses many issues: the representation of nature in our postmodern moment; nature as metaphor; the politics of ecological concerns; and most importantly, the human component and how we develop our relationship to the natural world.

Our response to the rekindled interest in nature and its present dilemmas has been the return to traditional forms of landscape painting—a sort of postmodern nostalgia, a longing for a more pristine time of innocence. It is refreshing that this exhibition eschews this conservative and sentimental view in favor of works that are more conceptually oriented as a critique or meditation of nature.

Except for a pair of video works and two sculptural pieces, the exhibition is largely composed of traditional media, i.e., painting, drawing, and photography, with a strong emphasis on painting. Regardless of media, the artists, for the most part, share at least one aesthetic position: a penchant for the handmade object rather than appropriated images and materials from mass culture. Moreover, the majority of these works are unabashedly sensual and seductive, intelligently tempered by a strong commitment to content.

Michiel Ryan's twin slabs of plywood, *Matberry Tree North View* and *Matberry Tree / West View* (both 1985/87) are seductive in both concept and craft. Ryan superimposes one image of nature on top of another. An image of a tree is cut into two-inch-thick standard sheets of plywood (4' x 6') with traces of ink rubbed into the grooved lines. In his investigation of the representation of nature, Ryan layers two simulations of nature: the plywood which is itself a fabricated wood product and the tree image mechanically incised into the surface with a router.

In *Threes*, a haunting and provocative painting, Vera Klemm represents nature as a memory and symbol. Juxtaposed in the painting are Klemm's signature im-

stretches across the bottom half of the work. Images and burles under a scrubbling of white paint in much the way memory fades or recedes with time. Through Klemm's expressive paint handling—the images actually grow out of the process—the forms take on an organic life of their own, suggesting how nature is shaped by culture and vice versa.

Fountain, a very witty and, at the same time, disturbing sculpture by David Holm, consists of a rotating lawn sprinkler enclosed in a plexiglas box. Nature here is represented in a blackly comic mood as the sprinkler relentlessly waters non-existent life.

Nic Nicolsa's large photograph *Real Picture #11* (79" x 48") depicts three young children as they witness the burning of a small tree that is obviously of their own design—one of the boys holds a gasoline can. The image suggests that we learn how to deal with nature at an early age: either to respect or exploit it.

Other notable works in this exhibition include Dave Klemm's impeccably crafted painting that is both apocalyptic and regenerative, Joe Andoe's bleak landscape reminds one of a small Rothko from a distance, and David Kroll's symbolic landscape with its intermingled trees reflects the duality of its title, *Wisdom and Desire*.

By purposely avoiding the more predictable name usually associated with the theme of nature—Mark Innert, Neil Janney, Ashley Bickerton, and the Harrisons, the curators have assembled a group of mostly local artists' works that infuse the show with a fresh and unexpected quality. Moreover, the theme of nature is an important and timely subject for art and this exhibition confronts the issues with intelligence and sensitivity.

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