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ETIENNE ZACK: REFLECTIONS ON A QUIET CITY

May 15 to June 12, 2021

Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

Equinox Gallery is pleased to present *Reflections on a Quiet City*, an exhibition of new works by Etienne Zack. Zack's new body of work collapses many realities together on the same surface by conflating materials (photography and painting) and perspectives. These seemingly incongruent natures find moments of seamless transition and other moments where they each distinctively hold their identity. The result is a series of works that reconcile several modes of looking at the world while simultaneously rendering a sense of a uniformity.

Zack began these paintings while participating in a series of artist residencies in Beijing. The compositions in the paintings are based from walking and cycling through the city, taking visual notes and photographs. Very much like the act of walking, Zack paints the composition as if he was in situ, depicting the city as he remembers it, as though he is walking forward, looking around. Similarly, Zack's photographic elements featured in these paintings come from wandering the web in search for street images. These combined imagined architectures hold the artist's memories and interpretations of moments in urban spaces, much like a walk through the Google Street View of Zack's mind.

Born in Montreal, Zack studied at Concordia University and at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. He has been awarded the prestigious RBC Canadian Painting Prize, and in 2008 he received the Prix Pierre-Ayot, awarded by the City of Montreal. In addition to exhibiting widely internationally, a solo mid-career retrospective with monograph was held at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art in 2010. A second monograph was published on the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Esker Foundation in Calgary in 2016.

Etienne Zack lives and works in Point Roberts.

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Reflections on a Quiet City

by Yang Tiange

Translated and edited from Mandarin

Etienne Zack's new paintings continue his investigations into "words" and "things," expressed through layered views of urban landscapes. Evolving from a deep interest in Chinese artistic traditions, especially the expressive modes of Chinese calligraphy and painting, this body of work brings together two distinct categories of media: acrylic, canvas and gel transfer techniques based on western painting conventions, and elements from Chinese painting traditions: calligraphy, ink, and xuan paper (paper made of mulberry leaves).

While participating in two artist residencies in Beijing, Etienne Zack was at the center of the unforeseen events that unfolded around the Coronavirus epidemic which suddenly intensified the element of "site-specificity" as everyone, including artists, were confined to small areas due to lockdown restrictions. These works were begun during his residency and completed upon his return to North America. The results are that the paintings cohesively bring together pan-geographical visual representations of cities.

In creating this group of works, Zack has included ready-made images procured from the internet. These images are printed and then set in place on the canvas through the gel transfer technique. The images used by Zack include a diverse array, sourced from different times and places. This quietly hints to the viewer the existence of a microcosm within the macrocosm. The artist also captures the changing colors of the city light, a light infused with neon hues following the principle of "*suileifucai*," meaning applying colors in accordance with the form of the object, to create multilayered representations of both urban and suburban scenes. However, just as how the artist uses swathes of color to recreate the gentle light, a city can also possess a kind and gentle nature. Zack's vision is an entire sky filled with a haze that doubles as a warm and inviting light.

The inclusion of snippets of memory, and the choice of form capture a tableau of the situation of the world at that specific time. In the vast city the streetscapes bear numerous complicated, disorderly, grotesque, and gaudy realities, steel doors, and railings. "Metaphor images¹" are grasped by the artist and spliced into the physical reality of the city, where different neighbourhoods delineate the different socio-economic groups in ways which are both obvious and indistinct. The elements of the painting are manifold, yet the placement and management of these elements is studied and intentional — complicated but not chaotic, readymade images and hand-drawn forms exist side by side, congealing into a variety of different views of time and space.

¹ Trans note: "Yuxiang" 喻象 is a term used by Song Dynasty painter Zhu Xi which refers to how metaphors can be used to fully express the essence of an image.