

ALEXANDRE

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TOM UTTECH: RECENT PAINTINGS

Alexandre Gallery

Romantic visions of nature might seem old-fashioned these days, but Tom Uttech's paintings continue to compel in his second show at Alexandre Gallery, opening Saturday. These 15 meticulous paintings of wooded swamps and lakeshores resonate with his peculiar mix of the proximate and the otherworldly. They contain no trace of humans, yet teem with life: tree trunks reaching to the skies, wolves roaming and blending with rocks, hundreds of birds saturating the air. All seem utterly self-possessed amid the riot of nature. When black bears rise up to stare at us, we feel like momentary, unexpected intruders.

The studied mysticism of these images recalls Casper David Friedrich, but Mr. Uttech's attack is considerably less hermetic. Working from memory and imagination, he employs a vibrant palette — deep browns, pinks, aqua-blues, pale yellow — to animate the march of tree trunks before receding lakes and skies. Details often capture the weight of light: In the sunset scene "Nind Ogwissinam" (2006), stolid, khaki-green lily pads are neatly suspended upon a pond's ethereal orange-pink; in "Bidaban" (2006), the mottled darks of a wolf stand out abruptly against a lake's expansive yellow. (All titles derive from Ojibwe, a Native American language.) The largest relationships — of earth to trees and sky — don't always achieve the same poignancy of color, but the mysteriousness accrues with each evocative, dream-like detail.



ALEXANDRE GALLERY
Tom Uttech, 'Nind Ogwissinam' (2006).

The striking, 10-foot-wide "Nin Mamoiamé" (2006) dominates the gallery's largest room. In the foreground, moss-covered banks become bold swaths of red and green. Foam curls delicately across the water lapping below, while slender strands of branches incise the sky above. The sumptuous tapestry of details suggests a nature-intoxicated Gustav Klimt.

Several small panels are adventuresome in other ways. In "Nin Baba Madaga" (2005), a blue-green ribbon winds around rocks and trees; an owl dives, echoing the aurora borealis draped in the sky. Is the ribbon a stream? Tiny fish seem to leap from its foremost section, but farther on it turns to an evanescent mist. Only occasionally in the exhibition does the mysteriousness turn coy — when, for instance, a bear or moose, hiding in brush, is seen only in a pond's reflection.

Mr. Uttech fashions his own frames of rustic wood, applying twigs and painted dragons to them. But one hardly needs these cues. Standing in front of these images, the viewer is readily drawn in by their quirky, original intent.

— *John Goodrich*

Until October 21 (41 E. 57th St. at Madison Avenue, 212-755-2828).

291 Grand Street, New York, New York 10002

25 East 73rd Street, 2nd Floor, New York, New York 10021 212.755.2828 alexandregallery.com

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