

John Walker's Licentious Landscapes at Tim Olsen Gallery

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(Courtesy Tim Olsen Gallery)

After the sell-out show of works by American painter **Jan Franks**, **Tim Olsen Gallery** has managed to latch on to the work of another incredible international artist in the form of English Born, American based abstractionist **John Walker**.

Recognised as one of the most interesting and accomplished painters of his generation, the 73-year-old artist prides himself on being able to create meaningful works of art that embody the concepts of presence, feeling and touch –the antithesis of beauty for the sake of beauty.

Although very much the epitome of an English gentleman – quiet and unassuming in both nature and demeanour – within the genteel exterior beats the heart of a passionate and inspired dissident of the anglicised landscape tradition.

Occasionally a glimpse of the lion within bubbles to the surface as it does when he retells the story of the moment he realised he had artistic talent. “During a primary school lesson the task was assigned to create an illustration relating to the story of Robin Hood. My drawing was singled out by the teacher and displayed to the class. It was at that moment I realised I was more intelligent than anyone else in the room,” Walker recalls. “I had articulated the limbs of Robin Hood and his Merry Men whereas the other children had merely drawn stick

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figures.”

In his latest series of large-scale paintings, a rogue element emerges that dominates the canvas yet awakens the landscape scene to which it is tied. Mimicking the ebb and flow of the polluted Maine coast waterway that is his favoured muse, at one moment the totemic forms – provocatively shrouded in yellows, reds and blues – entice the viewer into the landscape, the next moment they command undivided attention. And so it continues.

“Like a window and a wall”, is how the artist describes the experience his paintings evoke. On the one hand there is the wall, which represents the extreme frontal “skin” of the painting, and to the side of the wall is a window through which the viewer can experience another dimension and another plane. The totemic figures are the wall and the landscape is the image visible through the window.

The artist himself recalls being inspired by the crosses commemorating a life lost through a car or motorcycle accident that often appear by the side of the road, where they are usually anchored to telegraph poles or trees. He also had a desire to see what colour would look like on his usual, more earthy palette.

It is that earthy palette that is at the essence of his oeuvre. Purposely seeking out a landscape scene that was not traditionally beautiful, Walker found a small cove near his home in the city of Boston where the water was polluted and infested with industrial detritus – a place known as “dirty cove”. It is here that he experienced the harmonious amalgamation of inspiration, ambition and desire.

Appearing foreign to the environment in which they are entwined, the prominent geometric figures exhibit a ghostly presence suggestive of a more urban environment, from which they have perhaps been extricated to haunt the natural world which they now inhabit.

To go as far as to be able to call forth the very spirit of a time and place requires the confidence and assertiveness of a benevolent dictator. Combined with a masterly command of paint and brush, Walker’s intense affinity with the few landscape scenes that he has “claimed” as his own gives birth to an incredibly intense sensory experience.

Shakespeare once famously said: “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts. ...” Likewise, the landscape is merely a stage for Walker – a means by which he can express his innermost feelings and desires.

When the physical features of the landscape and the space they inhabit become two separate entities and two separate sources of inspiration, as they seem to do in Walker’s paintings, the static scenery becomes a sort of backdrop for the dramatic progression of time and tide, which waits for no man yet has been mastered by Walker.

[John Walker](#)’s works are in major museum collections worldwide, including the following: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; The Tate, London. The artist resides and works in Boston and near Walpole, Maine.

The full [John Walker](#) exhibition catalogue can be viewed [here](#)