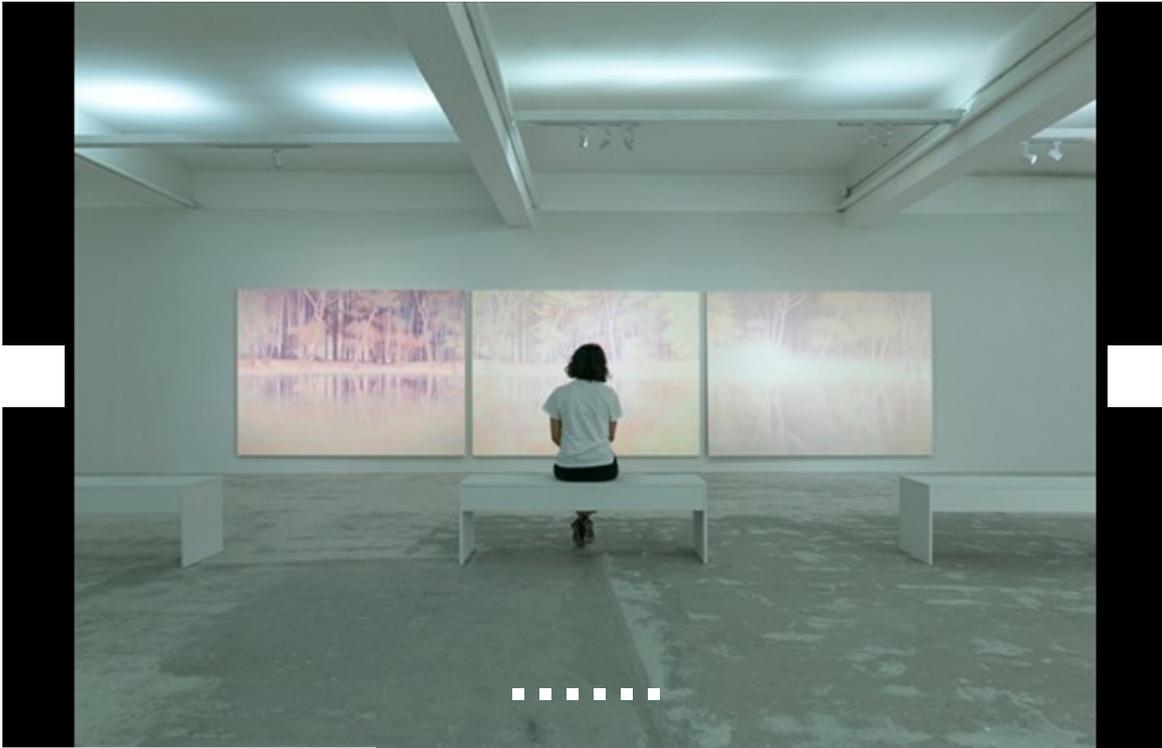


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From photo flaws to painted light



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👤 Jim Quilty | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: People can be obsessive about place. Show someone a photo of a mountain or glade, or a painting of a mountain or glade, chances are it'll provoke one of two responses. "Oh, I know where that is!" or, "Where is that?"

All the works on show in "Slow Light," Daniele Genadry's solo now up at Beirut Art Center, are landscapes, but if you ask, "Where's that?" you've missed the point.

While plenty of artists have made studies (indeed, careers) of how to depict the play of light upon an object, Genadry is interested in representing how light can obstruct our perception of surfaces.

Inspired by the technical shortcomings of early landscape photography, this body of work comes from the rigorous application of figuration to mechanically reproduced images.

Curated by BAC director Marie Muracciole, Genadry's most substantial Beirut exhibition to date is her most ambitious. Aware, perhaps, that gallerygoers have spent the day glancing furtively at the array of screens conditioning our lives, Genadry and Muracciole have deployed the work to coax visitors' eyes to pause and linger.

"The idea of the show is to create a trajectory through the physical space," Genadry told *The Daily Star*, "so that as you move through it, you experience images and light and perception with a changing awareness – at some point heightened, at some point just shifted."

The landscapes in "Slow Light" are shown in several media. In the foyer sits an installation of pencil sketches that acts as a sort of annex to the main show. These exacting miniatures document an intermediate step in the process of moving the image from photograph to canvas.

"We called this the drawing room," she smiled. The sketches "test the idea of, 'OK how do you deal with both composition, drawing and this absence/presence. What is the minimal information you need to read something. [At] the other extreme, can you read anything when you have all these insane details?'"

Conventionally, she explained, absence in a painting denotes nothing. Her work inverts this reading, so that absence signifies the intended subject, "the waterfall, or the mountain or the pond."

"If light is the background, nothing, an ephemeral thing, then these paintings are trying to make that background of ambient light (or whatever light is in the room) the surface, the subject of the paintings.

"In their own way, the drawings try to do that also. Take the thing that normally obscures, if it's too intense – or the pure absence, the emptiness that ordinarily doesn't give you anything – and see if I can use that obscurity or absence to make the thing that's slightly or totally intangible, present."

The exhibition starts with "Peripheral Vision," 2010-2018, a few small-scale landscapes shown in light boxes and scattered around an otherwise empty gallery.

Here, she said, "the images are quite tenuous and formed from light itself. So first you become aware of the light, then, as you move through, [you have] an opportunity to slow down and [become] a bit mesmerized by this wall projection."

A four-minute video loop from 2013, "Decalage" (shift), happens to have been shot on the coastal rail line between Genoa and Rome.

A projection of the video upon a painted frame was filmed and both sets of footage were combined to create the work.

"You can see that there's moments of greater [or lesser] dissonance," she observed. "There's probably three to four different layers – the actual video from the camera; the filmed, projected light – and a material shift, that painted surface, that are all interfering with each other.

"The idea of this, again, is both to create a pause, an awareness both of what you're looking at and [of] the tenuous nature of what you experience through this ephemeral, immaterial material – light itself."

With the diptych "Divergence Grey, Green," 2018, visitors encounter two canvases depicting the same landscape – a diminutive green one, and a much larger gray one.

They face one another from opposing walls, like an invitation to consider the consequences of scale.

The main gallery features a selection of large and mid-sized canvases, dating 2014-2018. Most are new, but there are a couple of acrylic-and-oil refugees from earlier Beirut expos – “The Glow,” seen at the 2015 AUB show “This is the Time,” and “The Fall,” the piece that named Genadry’s 2016 solo at Surssock.

Among the new works is an intriguing landscape study in triptych, titled “Purple Glade, Pink Gleam and White Clearing.”

“I really work much more with the relationship between the photo and the painting than the place,” she said.

One location is Lebanese. Another is a hybrid – mixing a depiction of a Lebanese mountain with another of Via Appia, built to connect ancient Rome to southeast Italy.

The touchstone for Genadry’s recent practice is the landscape work of 19th century photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), particularly his photos of Yosemite Valley’s Mirror Lake.

The canvases on the back wall of the main gallery are her interpretations of two photographic sources – Muybridge’s photos and found Google Images shots of the same sites. “In early black-and-white photography,” she said, “technicalities created this failure to capture moving water – actually anything moving in front of you in the landscape.

“In those photos you’d just have this blown-out white wherever there was rushing water or a lot of light. ... In being unable to capture water that looks like water, [these early photos] inadvertently capture the glow of light. That’s a pretty impressive feat.

“I thought maybe I can continue that [work] in these paintings, [depicting surfaces] you can’t really represent clearly, like a waterfall.

“Can the absence of paint or the canvas itself become this material stand-in for that ephemeral thing you’re trying to capture?”

Genadry’s figurative reflection upon the shortcomings of photographic practice is inherently interesting. Whether the public sees these canvases in the terms the artist intends or not, it doesn’t diminish the rigor of the practice, or the quality of the work.

Daniele Genadry’s “Slow Light” is up at BAC through Oct. 7.