

Multicolored eddies of wash whirl around floral photo/painting hybrids, spinning flowers and ghostly self-appropriated images into a surrounding cosmic stew where lotuses, anemones, dandelions and magnolias double as giant exploding stars, nuclear-bomb clouds and galaxies. As if in a state of suspended animation, ink splats dissolve as long rivulets and vibrant swaths of paint shoot and splash in every direction. Tiny inverted hieroglyphic-style cartoons of animals and humans alluding to ancient fables and myths arc across the painting field like zodiac mappings. Some of this figuration seems to emulate Indian or Persian miniatures, but with contemporary twists like high-rise buildings and hazes that connote pollution.

References to history painting easily commingle with these heterogeneous images, as in *The Rebellious Flowers Turned Away From the Sun* (2005), in which Jones places a circular excerpt from Copley's 1778 painting *Watson and the Shark* at the center of a dead flower. Its dried tendrils, composed of drippy brown paint, connect above to a droopy withered blossom and a giant sunflower, bursting like a firework into an aqueous blue sky. An implied association among history, photography and the ephemerality of nature is seen in *The Fisherman's Catch*. Near the bottom of the work, a photo of a hot-pink flower is at the center of a larger painted bloom. Floating in a balloon shape above is a softly tinted 19th-century image of two figures rowing a boat in a romantic tropical setting. With the tensions and contradictions between photographic reproduction and the loaded brush, past and present, and private and social narratives, it's tempting to read these works as allegories of the contemporary artist's longing for authentic experience in our highly mediated and ever mutating world.

—Constance Mallinson

SAN FRANCISCO

Jake Longstreth at Gregory Lind

Jake Longstreth's intriguing show "Wabi Ranch" was informed by the uncanny experience of encountering a suburban town for the first time and seeing nearly nothing—not a chain store, a tract home or an impersonal business complex—that you haven't seen before. The show included eight midsize paintings (all 2006), coolly rendered in flat areas of color, of ordinary American landscapes tailor-made for car culture and convenience. The exhibition took its title from the Japanese *wabi*, a term having to do with a spiritual path embracing impermanence and non-dependence on possessions; and "ranch," not in the sense of the Western ranch tended by cowboys, according to the press release, but "ranch" as in the more common "ranch houses and 'ranch'-flavored Doritos." Indeed, who has not witnessed the likes of *Vacaville*, with its white pickup truck and a car partially obscured by shrubbery lined up in what seems to be a generic drive-thru that could be anything from a bank to a cleaner's to a Starbucks?

The eerie tranquility and impersonal nature of Longstreth's work has more than a little to do with the paucity of people in his paintings. In *Glendora*, a minuscule lone figure—the only human to appear in the exhibition—is seen walking across a parking lot toward a colossal mall-like yellow structure. The mood is only enhanced by cloudless skies, mostly blue but sometimes wintry white, as in the case of *Think Tank*, an image of a corporate-park-style concrete building with black tinted windows. Two of the eight paintings here, *Untitled (Arizona)* and *Walnut Creek*, are landscapes; they depict desert knolls and flowering bushes, respectively. But highway pavement is visible in both, upsetting their potentially mawkish pastoral appeal.

Whether Longstreth is fond or disdainful of the environments he chooses to portray isn't apparent, and his indifference only furthers his show's strange serenity. What becomes apparent in looking at these manufactured environments is their paradoxical impermanence and variety. *Lake Chambers* is a

milky depiction of a pale beige minivan sitting in front of a sun-bleached beige shopping center housing a Subway sandwich shop; *Idaho Falls* depicts a fragment of a giraffe's head on a rainbow-striped gray box store that can likely be identified by a majority of American consumers as a Toys "R" Us.

Like de Chirico's *pitte metafisiche*, all of Longstreth's paintings here might be regarded as fantasy towns signifying alienation and loss of nature. And as Longstreth is no doubt aware given his invocation of *wabi*, no matter how much superstores and hypermarkets may dominate our present-day reality, they're nonetheless, like everything, imperfect and impermanent.

—Sarah Valdez

TORONTO

Paulette Phillips at Diaz Contemporary

Paulette Phillips's first solo show at Diaz was spare, consisting of a sculpture and a flat-panel monitor, both installed on the gallery walls. Made of electronic components and multi-colored wiring, the sculpture, *Home-wrecker I* (2005), has been meticulously engineered to serve a single absurd purpose: a white chiffon scarf is held in midair just below the device by means of a magnetic field. Hovering at eye level, the kerchief delicately drapes down from its center like a child's notion of a ghost. It often sways when observers move or pass by.

The downward cascade of the suspended scarf was echoed by the rushing water of Niagara Falls in the looping video *Monster Tree* (2006). A Toronto-based artist, Phillips is known for film and video installations that create tension between idyllic landscape settings and sinister or subversive suggestions. In *Monster Tree*, the camera moves from lush views of waterfalls and moss-covered rocks shrouded in mist to tourists on the bustling thoroughfare that overlooks the water. The focus on honeymooners in horse-drawn carriages inevitably brings up the theme of nature as commercial spectacle. Beyond that rather familiar



Jake Longstreth: *Idaho Falls*, 2006, acrylic on panel, 36 inches square; at Gregory Lind.

observation, a soundtrack of ominous, heavy breathing plays throughout the video, evoking uneasy and perverse connotations of voyeurism or predation.

Eventually, the camera pans slowly to the trees in the foreground that frame the vigorously flowing water in the distance. The artist closes in on the trunk of an immense tree with a large burl jutting out. The malformation looks remarkably like a pig's head: a snout and two dark hollows suggesting eyes. The breathing noise becomes a louder growl; then, suddenly, moving eyeballs appear in the hollows of the facelike deformity. A creature, it appears, resides within. This presence strikes a grotesque note that leads to thoughts about the perverse ways we frame nature in our society.

—Dan Adler

LONDON

Hannah Starkey at Maureen Paley

Generally, photography is a medium that makes the active world stand still, but Hannah Starkey is uniquely adept at representing the rare, disquieting, solitary moments when one's environment itself seems frozen by a thought or revelation. The 36-year-old Belfast-born and London-based photographer initially employed actors for her carefully staged images of women in prosaic poses and everyday settings. But the protagonists of the five beautiful large-scale tableaux in her fifth solo show at Maureen Paley were all fortuitously encountered strangers. And while these women appear comfortable in the places where Starkey photographed them,

Paulette Phillips: *Monster Tree*, 2006, 16mm film transferred to DVD, 5½ minutes; at Diaz Contemporary.

