


Dan Attoe: Beauty and Clumsiness

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | JULY 04, 2016



 View Slideshow

Detail of Dan Attoe's "Surfers on Still Water, 8" (2016)
Courtesy of the artist and Half Gallery, New York)

RELATED

ARTISTS

Edward Ruscha

Washington-based painter Dan Attoe might consciously tip his hat to the Hudson River School, but his mountainous visions of the sublime hold an unexpectedly comedic (and often perverse) undercurrent. His beach, ski-slope, and forest scenes are populated by figures so tiny you might miss them — and they're speaking an even tinier dialogue, rendered in silver oil paint. In one painting, on view earlier this year at Half Gallery in New York, several nude women are posed on a pier jutting out into an icy lake, attended by what appears to be a pair of Canadian Mounties ("I did everything you told me to," one of them says). "Family at Waterfall," 2016, shows a trio of revelers about to take a dip; something about the loaded positioning of the bodies against the grandeur of nature recalls the recent output of Gregory Crewdson, except with a sense of humor. "All of the elements are characters — light, topography, plants, rocks, people, the sky, and weather and atmosphere," Attoe says. "In this way, I see painting as composing short stories. Most of the fictitious places in my paintings are based on actual locations, but probably in the same sense that Stephen King's characters are based on people he knows."

Part of the thrill of an Attoe painting is the jarring ways these different components combine. "The scale of the landscape compared to the people is a key part of the atmosphere," he explains. "Much of that does have to do with a feeling of longing for something I remember — something beautiful, peaceful, ominous, and awe-inspiring. At the same time, I feel an equally important urge to disrupt this. The figures and the text require a different kind of focus. The landscape can be enjoyed for its beauty and the disparity between it and the figures, but it also exists in service to these contemporary people in funny or ordinary clothing, saying everyday things about e-mails or engaging in interpersonal clumsiness."

Dan Attoe's work is on view July 11 through August 20 in "Mount Analogue," a group show also featuring [Ed Ruscha](#), among others, and curated by Neville Wakefield and Darrow Contemporary, hosted in a pop-up at the Performance Ski shop in Aspen, Colorado.