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Beauty and Awkwardness: Dan Attoe's Landscapes

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | MARCH 28, 2016



Dan Attoe's "Mountains with Skiers, 7," 2016. (Courtesy Half Gallery.)

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Washington-based painter [Dan Attoe](#) might consciously tip his hat to the Hudson River School, but his mountainous visions of the sublime secret an unexpectedly comedic (and often perverse) undercurrent. His beach, ski slope, and forest scenes are populated by figures so tiny that you might miss them — and they're speaking even tinier dialogue, rendered in silver oil paint. In one painting, on view at [Half Gallery](#) in New York through April 9, 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 said. "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 way these different components combine in jarring ways. "The scale of the landscape compared to the people is a key part of the atmosphere," he said. "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 pull the viewer from whatever beauty is in the landscape, and 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."