

Wondrous Wallpaper

Artist Adam Cvijanovic brings his illusionistic panoramas, including scenes of an exploding LA, to Kemper Contemporary.

BY NANCY STAAB, PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEMPER CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM OF ART



Nuart, 2006, Flashe and latex on Tyvek, 180 x 360 inches Collection of Christopher Hamick

13 other works, at the Kemper Museum. Cvijanovic has also painted colossal 21-foot-high landscapes of forbidding glaciers that are reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner and Caspar David Friedrich in their romantic and sublime interpretations of nature.

Some of these pieces are like installation art, flowing out into the gallery space with physical props in addition to the painted murals. He's also turned his jaundiced eye on Los Angeles and visually exploded the city in hyperreal, fresco-like murals depicting kitschy pieces of pop culture twisted violently in the air as if by a tornado out of Oz. These apocalyptic paintings are humorous, awe-inspiring, terrifying and a sly comment on the emptiness of our culture. The scenes may be frightening but they are rendered in the prettiest pastels against a clear, Botticelli-like blue sky. One almost expects to see a few Renaissance cherubs milling about with the debris of 21st century society: movie theater marquees, cars, laundry detergent boxes, plastic toys, Coke bottles, gas stations and flying shingles everywhere.

Saatchi Gallery in London describes these works, several on view at the Kemper, as follows: "Envisioning sun-bleached LA 10 minutes after the end of gravity, Cvijanovic's utopia ascends in a whirlwind of consumerist ecstasy." The artist's viewpoint is aloof and Olympian. Humans are rendered small and insignificant, if present at all.

Cvijanovic's subjects are at times modern but his murals are steeped in the study of Old Master paintings and it's a fun exercise to guess the artistic antecedents for the pieces. A self-taught artist who quit school at age 17, Cvijanovic has his work shown at the Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg) Saatchi Gallery (London), Hammer Museum (LA), Tate Liverpool and various New York galleries. For the Kemper exhibition, Cvijanovic will unveil three new works: Flint Hills (2015), inspired by the artist's site visit to the region last fall; Hollywood and Sunset (2014-15), his reintroduction of the human figure into his artwork after almost a decade; and The Fall (Capri) (2015), the artist's first work to include a soundtrack.

In a 2012 show, Cvijanovic described his works as a "meditation on painting and its meta-capacity to transform the real, the historic and the imagined space." His conflated works do just that and leave the viewer with a sense of wonder both for the scenes depicted and the artist's virtuoso skill at producing such illusions.

New York-based artist Adam Cvijanovic, 54, is a bit like the P. T. Barnum of the art world. His enveloping and illusionistic murals (which he wryly refers to as "wallpaper") are spectacles to behold. Whether working with 16-foot-high painted panels or with his most recent material of choice, massive sections of Tyvek (the synthetic material used to wrap construction projects), which he paints for portable murals, Cvijanovic's work is epic in subject and scale.

In his career the artist has tackled the grandiose vision and hubris of filmmaker D. W. Griffith by reproducing the movie scenes and crumbling physical sets from Griffith's 1916 flop *Intolerance*. In fact, the scene of the ancient Babylonian feast from the film will be on view, along with