

Summer is not over until 9/23! : A Time Before We Were Born: Visions of Arcadia in Contemporary Painting

Sylvia Wald and Po Kim Gallery, 6/26-9/29, 2018.

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Archie Rand, "Sisters" (1983), 58" x 143"

Do we still dream of Arcadia? A secluded pastoral idyll, idly herding goats and playing the pipes invented by Pan—and Arcadia invented Pan (really). We could frolic with the fauns and the nymphs in an unspoiled mountain forest. In Arcadia, life is so delightful that greed and jealousy simply fall away.

I seem to hear you asking if there is cell phone service, Wi-Fi, healthcare and whether a faun and a nymph can afford college for offspring. And say we gaily went, a band of poor dreamers willing to give up all that, how long would it last these days? One of two things would happen. Either some essential mineral would be found and the mountains strip-mined, or the elite would helicopter in and find it "authentic and unspoiled" and that would be the end of that.

There are some wonderful paintings in this show, but for the above reasons I assume and a couple others that I might describe, the visions of Arcadia in this show don't quite manage to inspire a quick getaway. A wolf lurks in almost every one.



Paul Georges, "Backyard Sagaponack w/ Muse" (1980-82), 55" x 165"

For ex, *Backyard*... is suburban, art-colony like, the lovers are furtive with a post-eating-the-apple air. I'm sure Eden was nice in its way but it was socially isolated, not sexy—it was so easy to put a wrong foot there—to my mind Arcadia is vastly preferable.



Judith Linhares, "Water" (2018), 29" x 40"

And *Water*? A picnic in Arcadia? Or a cautionary tale for Woman? Or for Man? A shadow is beginning to fall on his blissful ignorance, her glance might not be tender, and there is the pail which must be hauled. Perhaps when they are a little further down the road that extends towards the moon; I'm an optimist, these things might be worked out.

This reminds me that Arcadia should not be confused with Utopia. A utopia is a planned community where division of labor would be spelled out. Unfortunately every attempt to move towards such a society has been so awful: Nazi Germany, Communism, Jonestown, etc. that any grand idea of engineering social good is seen as suspect.



Rafael Ferrer, "Conquista de la Soledad" (1990-91), 60" x 72"

I hoped that at least one painting would be so delightful that *my* avarice would disappear. The jungle behind this house is alluring— but somehow I think the artist is also suggesting want or maybe I just took it that way because I've seen so many photographs of people living in poor conditions post-Maria without electricity or health care. (Health care—the expense, and the lack of it—is one of the main obstacles in imagining Arcadia.)

But the thought unbidden that sprang to mind was that poor people suffer but their joys are more intense too. Before you jump to the conclusion that I'm rationalizing poverty or talking about other people I'll give an example. We don't use AC (climate change, you know, and claustrophobia), so at times I was miserably hot this summer but the joy I felt when visiting the public pool or the beach or when a slightly cool breeze sprang up sometimes of an evening was surprisingly intense.

Somewhere in this thought is a clue to how we might live in a more just, sustainable and possibly even happier society—less for some and more for others. Anyway this painting has stayed in my mind—the people in it continue to gaze at me.



Roy De Forest, "View of Lake Louise" (1979), 75" x 87"

A memory of an LSD-fueled hippie vacation? (There is the wolf.) And that's another Arcadian thing: nostalgia—the time and the place you were happy in and have no possibility to return to. Well, some people look happy; the blond doesn't.



Archie Rand, "Sisters" (detail) (1983), 58" x 143"

That theme is also taken up in *Sisters* (see also above) which is suffused with memory—the faintly washed-in seated man is daydreaming. The landscape of the dream with its seamless flow between inside and outside is wonderful. The sisters? — maybe he was trying to choose between them and lost them both and he (and we) wonder if he ever really knew them at all.



Katherine Bradford, "Grand Night Swim" 2018 , 40" x 30"

Perhaps the best thing, until some grander solution to some or all of the problems of modern life can be found, is to muddle along finding and savoring Arcadian joys where we can.



This is a picture of the real Arcadia in Greece.

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- o Archie Rand
- o Judith Linhares
- o Katherine Bradford
- o Paul Georges
- o Rafael Ferrer
- o Roy De forest
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