

## Eric Aho

DC MOORE GALLERY

In 1963, art historian Max J. Friedländer argued that “in a world from which the gods have vanished, the miracle and enigma of landscape remains.” Are Eric Aho’s landscapes—such oil paintings as *Trail (Third Approach to the Mountain)*, *Hemlock Ravine*, and *The Straw Field* (all works cited, 2013)—enigmatic and miraculous? Yes, to the extent that they constitute an attempt “to get closer to nature” while “avoid[ing]

subjective point. Aho’s messy *The Straw Field* evinces a fascination with light, now golden rather than pure white, but still luminous. The artist seems to dismember the subject with his brushstrokes, much like van Gogh did. I am suggesting that *painting*, not the landscape, is the point of Aho’s landscape paintings. He chooses to paint landscapes because they are the ideal embodiment of the spirit of painting.

—Donald Kuspit



Eric Aho, *Wilderness Studio*, 2013, oil on linen, 62 x 80".

the banality of the objective” (as Friedländer put it, writing about Monet). Aho’s forests, mountains, ravines, and straw fields recall Impressionist and Post-Impressionist landscape painting; they are not objectively described but convey his sensations, his subjectivity—the “personal idiosyncrasy” that Friedländer thought was involved in Cézanne’s landscape paintings.

Aho is surrounded by wilderness. His New England studio has windows that look out onto trees, and he regularly takes long walks in the surrounding woods, recording his responses mentally and working those reactions onto canvases from memory. In *Spanish Guest*, the mountains are glimpsed distantly, hesitantly through a matrix of awkward, eccentric interwoven brushstrokes that seriously draw your attention. Perhaps the most striking—certainly the most distinct—painting in the exhibition was *Wilderness Studio*, inspired by a visit Aho recently paid to the atelier of a nineteenth-century Finnish Romantic painter. The building’s sturdy geometric structure, opaquely and ominously black, contrasts abruptly with eccentrically shaped and luminous orange forms that seem to float on its wall, at once part of it yet a physical and expressive world apart. The steeply pitched roof has a sky-blue outline, which drops like a waterfall and merges with the painterly pool of the sky. To compound the tension—a sort of tour-de-force demonstration of the geometrical and gestural extremes of abstraction—the solid studio rests on murky, insubstantial ground. The boldness of the contrasts in the work and the self-reference implicit in any image of the studio make the painting Aho’s most daringly personal.

Of course, Aho is not simply responding to his New England environment, but to the long history of modern landscape painting. Taken collectively, his paintings recapitulate a number of styles: Some works tip over into abstraction (*Descendant*); others are charged with an Expressionist intensity (*Ravine Pool*); and still others evince Impressionist immediacy (*CANADA*). Yet, in each of these cases, Aho’s paintings all but dissolve and destroy the observed object to make a