

Madeline Ludwig-Leone

Clear Mirror

March 27 – April 6, 2024

Gallery 1, 1111 S Arroyo Pkwy

ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, CA

The process of painting a landscape is inherently one of framing. The artist controls what to include in the scene, but what is excluded often says just as much. In my work, I employ structures of spatial control, such as frames, walls, hedges, and moats, in a paradoxical mode. Although the spaces within the paintings are spare and starkly geometric in form, they do not present themselves as places that can be entered, claimed, or even fully comprehended. Flat planes seem to warp and recede, and nonsensical structures create confusion between inside and outside, natural and manmade.

Sometimes the scenes in the paintings seem to withhold information. In *Light Round*, for instance, the top of a tree is visible, but the trunk and roots are hidden from view behind a curved wall. There is a similar sense of nondisclosure in *Green Projection*, the largest work in the show. In it, a lone tree casts both its shadow onto a green wall and its reflection onto a moat-like body of water below. The shadow of the tree's foliage is visible, but the leaves themselves are framed out of view. The unseen leaves may not even exist, and the moat in which the tree is reflected could also be read as a mirror, a fissure, or even a window into a parallel universe. Other times, the paintings embody a repressed longing for the unattainable. *Radicles* provides a vision of roots growing underground, not through soil but through air. The process by which a tree absorbs water, typically only understood through the mind's eye, is represented in a speculative form that announces itself as a depiction of a fantastical idea, not a realistic biological mechanism.

Meyer Schapiro describes the frame in visual art as “a homogeneous enclosure like a city wall...it is like a window frame through which is seen a space behind the glass. The frame belongs then to the space of the observer rather than the illusory, three-dimensional world disclosed within and behind.” Like walls and hedges, frames delineate space, keeping certain

things in and certain things out. Separating public from private, domestic from foreign, and indoors from outdoors, these devices are often idealized and associated with class and wealth. One need only think of how the white picket fence or the castle moat have become aspirational objects of desire. *Pleached Niche II (Under a Loggia)* plays with the frame's role. The border around the outside of the image, painted in a seductive shade of pink, belongs both to the observer's space and the illusory space beyond. "Pleached" is a term for a raised hedge trimmed from a row of trees, such as the one in the painting. This type of hedge is often grown for purely aesthetic purposes, but in this case, it barricades the viewer from entering the scene.

In all five paintings, portions of the linen substrate are left raw, creating a sense that parts of the image have been "switched off" or deactivated. The natural, variegated color of the linen serves as a foil to the artificially bright, smooth colors of the painted surfaces, echoing the dialogue between natural and manmade happening within the compositions.

If nature is a reflection of us, and vice versa, then our desire to control nature is indicative of a desire for control over ourselves. However, I believe that the reflection between humans and nature is an active one, in which each party can affect the other. My hope is that through the process of making these paintings, the world I am creating will become a fully realized place, autonomous enough to make its own demands. It is a world that resists illusionism and Cartesian perspective, presenting itself as an alternative view that challenges the notion of human mastery over nature.