

central to the controversy, leaving a ghostly, censored silhouette of a figure standing in the museum's galleries. That the word *zachęta* means "encouragement" here serves as a wry comment on the forcefulness with which the art on view inspired the public to "engage" it.

In Macuga's work, the censorship enacted by the Communist People's Republic of Poland seem merely part of a cycle of art desecration in the country, which includes the actions of today's public and right-wing government, closely tied to the Polish Catholic Church. Perhaps the artist and playwright Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, a favorite of Kantor's, was right when he had the titular character of his 1923 play *Janulka* claim of Poland's recursive but somehow ever-intensifying past: "History has doubled back until its nose touches its backside, and now it's eating its own tail."

—Eva Díaz

Darren Waterston

DC MOORE GALLERY

Grand, visionary landscapes unfold across the seventeen oil paintings from 2012 in Darren Waterston's exhibition at DC Moore, all of which appear on gessoed wood panels (with the exception of *Edifice*, which is on canvas) and vary in size from large to small. The exquisitely strange scenes are based on nature. Meticulously drawn pine trees proliferate throughout, forming a dark ring around the luminous center of *City of Sun*, growing from a spindly, desiccated trunk in *City on the Edge*, or looming above an outcrop of rock in *Island*.

In the last of the works, a small, abstracted city sits beneath three trees. If the city is a synecdoche for the earth, the pustulelike red stars glowing in the sky may signal the planet's fate—feverish red being the color of a dying star. Likewise, the bubblelike "knots" that seem to grow on the trunk of the central tree may be cancerous tumors, suggesting that the tree will eventually expire, becoming a blurry ruin, as has the hazy treelike form to its right, or die, as the tree to its left has done. For the moment, however, that central tree remains triumphantly dignified, holding its own in the cosmic emptiness.

"Waterston has often engaged with mythological, theological, and natural histories," the gallery tells us. With this in mind, we might speculate that the three trees in *Island* allude to the crucifixion, as do the three trees in Rembrandt's famous print *The Three Trees*, 1643. The painting *Agony in the Garden* also appears to rework that famous theme, with twisted dead branches—one bloodred, the other gray—converging to form a sort of tormented figure, an invisible but felt presence that

conveys Christ's suffering in ambiguously abstract and natural terms. Similar allusions appear elsewhere. *The Isle of Pines*, for example, references Henry Neville's 1668 novel of the same title, but it could also be read as a reworking of Arnold Böcklin's *The Isle of the Dead*, 1880.

Waterston is elaborately equivocal. It is not clear whether he is mocking traditional religious motifs or using them to make the modern eschatological point that nature is dead or

dying. And the artist's paintings have an undercurrent of angry futility, perhaps most explosively evident in the blackly humorous *Cathedral*, which looks like a ruin on a Martian landscape.

Waterston's aesthetic vibrancy compensates for the morbidity of his vision. His backgrounds are composed of luxurious, overlapping fields of color; painterly flourishes abound, among them artful drips that defy gravity; and abrupt shifts in perspective add drama to the scenes. He finds beauty and sublimity in trauma. I suggest that Waterston is a latter-day Romantic naturalist, as much on the sublime edge as Caspar David Friedrich and as obsessed with infinite space and radiant light as J. M. W. Turner—though the nature Waterston's images depict has seen better days.

—Donald Kuspit

Haroon Mirza

NEW MUSEUM

For his first New York solo exhibition, curated by Gary Carrion-Murayari and Jenny Moore, British artist Haroon Mirza stocked the New Museum's next-door storefront space with signal emitters. Studio speakers issue modemlike trills, junk-shop televisions flash syncopated bursts of white noise, and strips of LED lights intermittently douse the room in red, blue, or green. It is an installation that doubles as a concert, a pulsing electric fugue.



View of "Haroon Mirza," 2012.

Surprisingly, the installation also supplies an inadvertent comment on the legacy of Matisse, specifically the painter's characterization of his art as "for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue." Though it's debatable whether Matisse's first audiences actually found the perceptual eddies of his early painting "calming," this infamous statement furnishes a memorably haptic analogy for art's social function within modernism: as a cushion for compensatory repose. Mirza's ensemble includes nine paintings—or rather, nine fixtures rhetorically occupying the space of painting—that come off as lampooning Matisse's claim by literalizing it. Spaced evenly around the room are identical five-by-seven panels covered in black-foam spikes, a cladding common to recording studios. Here are monochromes as soft and padded as Matisse's armchair. Yet they aren't installed to swaddle mental workers, but to muffle errant echoes—that is, to reduce reverberation.

As science historian Emily Thompson explains in her 2003 study of early-twentieth-century acoustics, reverberation—the lingering of

Darren Waterston, *Island*, 2012, oil on wood panel, 16 x 20".

