

Darren Waterston's "Remote Futures" at DC Moore Gallery

by [ellen croisier](#)



Pastoral Scene, 2012

Remote Futures, [Darren Waterston's](#) first show at [DC Moore Gallery](#), is a fascinating combination of Japanese landscapes and science fiction. The artist references traditional Japanese landscape paintings in more ways than one. In addition to the calligraphic brushwork mentioned in the show's press release, the tradition of the "imaginary landscape" • popular in East Asian paintings lends itself to Waterston's depictions of the future. Waterston's paintings, brilliantly glazed on wooden panels, use the lyrical qualities of the Japanese landscape to illustrate futures straight out of a science fiction movie.



Edifice, 2012

In gallery settings, it is rare to have titles accompany pieces on the wall. Often, there will be a price list or catalogue at the front desk for inquiring minds, but the fun in these shows can lay in the mystery. When I grabbed a title sheet for *Remote Futures*, I first looked at the titles of paintings that were grouped together, and was surprised to see that two pieces that were paired were titled “Constructing Paradise no.2” • and “Constructing Paradise no.3.” • But”|where was number one? Interestingly enough, it was in another area entirely. While I would absolutely recommend that you walk through the galleries title-free to build your own readings, this was an instance where I found the titles to be enlightening, as it encouraged me to take a second look at all the pieces and see what kind of dialogue existed through this “construction.” •



Constructing paradise no.1, 2012

When read in context, the paintings allude to the evolutionary process of creation. Compiled of abstract figures just on the cusp of tangibility, “Constructing Paradise no.1” • documents “creation” • in its most basic state. The shapes emerging from the ethereal background don’t gain definition until the second and third paintings in the series, which are paired together in a different section of the gallery. “Constructing Paradise no.2” • and “no.3” • refer to landscapes with which we’re more familiar — once we see trees, we know we’re home. The second painting in the series still carries with it the warmth of conception, while the cool blues and greens used in “no.3” • construct an earthly landscape inhabited with comforting evergreens.



Constructing paradise no. 2 and no. 3, 2012

I find that there are always one or two paintings that keep you thinking. You walk away, return, lean back on one leg, and just stare. At *Remote Futures* I found myself doing that with at least five paintings, and am forever thankful to the zoom on my camera for catching things I would have otherwise missed. You need to get close to some of these paintings and truly examine the masterful detail Waterston has included. Cities become secondary to larger-than-life trees and over-emphasized strata, dwarfed by extremes of nature. It seems common in dystopian art, from paintings to novels, to highlight the fragility of human technology and emphasize the dominance of nature. In Waterston's paintings, the inclusion of the remains of society ranges from poetic to turbulent, highlighted in the variance of his color palate and rendering of his figures.



Cathedral, detail, 2012



Island, detail, 2012

When I first arrived in the gallery, I went to the back (I actually almost always do this — I’m not a huge fan of crowds, and since most people crowd around the wine table near the front, the back rooms tend to be emptier). Set on its own wall was a piece that seemed out of place. There were no figures, no calligraphic brushwork; it was as if Waterston had left the piece unfinished. I took a quick picture and began to study other pieces in the gallery, but found myself returning to the “unfinished” • painting every few minutes. With each visit, I saw something new: crashing waves, an impending storm, fog at dawn, an earthquake. I also noticed that this scene really *was* the background of many of the paintings in the gallery and was not an unfinished painting, but more like an unfinished universe. Other paintings in the back room were similarly abstracted, and all represented the beginning stages of creation. Ironically, I later learned that the title of the piece was “Remote Futures,” • truly the backbone of the show.



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