

Press Reviews

'Paul de Flers : Green Street', MutualArt, March 2021



“La nuit américaine” is a filmmaking technique for shooting outdoor scenes during the daytime and making it look as if they take place at night. Similarly, now on view in the Front Space of Almine Rech in the Marais, Paul de Flers’ new paintings invite to a warm summer evening, expressed through a dark sky and contrasting, striking light sources dominated by green and blue.

For the show Green Street, Paul de Flers has painted imaginary nighttime or twilight landscapes with warm tones of orange, purple, and ultramarine that transport us into a wild environment of lush nature. Here, nature takes over, and wild dogs look human, with the attitudes and appearance of an organized group that is in control. Conversely, the humans are still, mysterious, rigid figures standing like sculptures on their rocky bases. We glimpse their silhouettes in profile as they witness the environment whose scale they establish.

Like the Oulipo literary movement, which experiments with writing using arbitrary formal constraints, Paul de Flers enjoys painting under constraint, guided by the spots of paint on a canvas that has already been used or has been purposely daubed with paint at random. There are multiple narratives that can be read in all directions, and it is not unusual to find several hidden strata under the surface of the artwork. A clean canvas is never truly clean: it is cleared, arbitrarily marked by spots of paint, sanded until it gives way, torn down like a palimpsest. Through this process of withdrawal, the canvas loses materiality but gains in transparency and light, like the votive offerings that occur throughout the exhibition and whose thin metal sheets are resurfacing after centuries.

These little religious scenes, which have been very popular in Mexico since the 16th century, speak of dangers and miracles. These phenomena are also found in the work of Paul de Flers, through shifting identities of different elements, where a tree can become a cloud in the sky, a human figure can become still and frozen like a sculpture, and a wild animal can take on a human appearance. In this exhibition, Paul de Flers creates an implicit dialogue between his paintings and this composition of Mexican votive offerings with which he shares the same sensibility for symbolic narratives, muted colors, and vanishing points.