

Widewalls

Michael Hilsman Presents Works Inspired by Californian Landscape at Almine Rech

By Balasz Takc, February 23, 2022.



Michael Hilsman - Man In Landscape With Water (detail), 2021 Oil on linen, 147.3 x 223.5 cm, 58 x 88 in © Michael Hilsman - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Matthew Kroening.

Throughout modern art history, a range of artists have been inspired by a specific landscape. Eager to explore those surroundings' potentials, they would often return to their favorite terrain. Such is the case with the American painter Michael Hilsman, whose constant source of inspiration is the Southern California landscape, where he was born and raised. His self-reflective paintings feature objects and figures that enjoy equal status and are used to construct compositions that address the complexities of the self.

Titled *Man On Bed*, the exhibition of his recent body of work will be shown at Almine Rech gallery in Paris, marking the first time Hilsman presents himself in France.

The Painterly Practice of Michael Hilsman

Through his practice, Michael Hilsman extends classical painting in his own right by reexamining portraiture and still life genres. The painter developed a unique style situated between expressionism and naturalism by depicting ambiguous and symbolic elements such as shells, plants, feathers, clothes, and body parts.

His paintings generate the surreal, the latent spirituality of objects, and the liaison between the physical and metaphysical. Hilsman often inscribes particular words or titles throughout the picture plane to create the impression of a theatrical backdrop for objects and figures in states of dissolution. The artist's inspiration spans from the bewildering paintings of the 16th-century Italian artist Arcimboldo to the puzzling works by Philip Guston.

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The Moments of Solitude

The upcoming exhibition bears the title Man On Bed after one of the works. This particular painting features a man's feet lurking from beneath a blanket. At the same time, the scene evokes the atmosphere of daydreaming while showcasing man's estrangement from his own body, typical for the contemporary moment.

Other works such as Flowers, Shells, Hammer, Nails (2021) and Two Flowers, Two Cacti (2021) manifest the painter's dissemination of the still life genre, while the one titled Man In Landscape With (2021) represents Hilsman's exploration of the portraiture genre.

While living in Pakistan, the artist became acquainted with the Islamic tradition of aniconism that forbids material representations. This inspiration led him to explore the tensions between absence and presence by introducing the shroud used to obscure the face of a figure. By covering the man's face with the plant or an object, the artist transforms his body into another entity that becomes part of the scenery. Most of his paintings feature the artist's figure in various poses, adding a comical flavour to his practice.

Michael Hilsman at Almine Rech

The upcoming exhibition will present the latest chapter in Hilsman's stylistic and conceptual development while highlighting the main feature of his signature style - the artist's apparent interest in the surreal.

Michael Hilsman: Man On Bed will be on view at Almine Rech gallery in Paris from February 24th through April 2nd, 2022.



Left: Michael Hilsman - Man In Landscape With Water, 2021 Oil on linen, 147.3 x 223.5 cm, 58 x 88 in / Right: Michael Hilsman - Two Flowers, Two Cacti, 2021 Oil on linen, 127 x 182.9 cm, 50 x 72 in © Michael Hilsman - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Matthew Kroening.

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