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Wide Perspectives on Landscapes

By DeWitt Cheng



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Mansfield painting detail.

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Sculptor Pamela Merory Dernham and painter Walter James Mansfield, who showed previously together six years ago, are reunited

for *This Land We Share*, exploring landscape, in the broadest sense—political and psychological as well as geologic/geographic.

Merory Dernham, known for her lyrical, figurative steel wire sculptures—wall-mounted sketches in space delineating people in movement—now places her figures in situations and scenarios that reflect current events. They become protagonists in the human drama, minimalist versions of Rodin’s maximalist actors in plaster and bronze. *Personal Landscape: In the Fresh Air* presents three groups of figures at ease in nature, silhouetted atop wire hill and valley horizons. *Political Landscape: Shelter from the Storm* and *Political Landscape: Fiddling While Rome Burns* take on urgency, with the figures now distressed and agitated by invisible forces in the former—or, in the latter, ignoring the increasing heat of the ground beneath their feet, yellow turning red, distracted into willfully ignorance. Four *Vertical Landscape* pieces are composed of overlapping elongated facial profiles, mouths closed: silent watchers and judges of commons and commonweal?

Mansfield’s 15 beautifully crafted landscape paintings take several approaches. *Architectural Head (Green)* comes from his Cubist head series, while *Figure Field II* comes from a later series depicting landscape as an abstract expressionist all-over matrix of markings, centerless and infinite. In *Zion Inspired*, *Zion 2*, *Panorama at Kaleb Canyons*, *Exposing the Secrets of Time*, *Joshua Tree*, and *Mountain*, all from 2017, Mansfield adopts the traditional realist painter’s “scenic” point of view but transcends mere realism. The first two paintings meld painterly process with geology; the images seem to be made by the landscape itself. The latter three, with their somewhat cartoony accretions of scree, talus, and stony clouds, bring Gustonian humor to what might be called the national-park art tradition.

This Land We Share runs through Dec. 23; Vessel Gallery, 471 25th St., Berkeley, 510-893-8800, Vessel-gallery.com.