

The Spirit World of Max Standley

Artist's magical realism reveals Nature's hidden identity



Max Standley, *Sanctuary Light*, oil on panel, 18" x 24"

By Mareva Lindo for *The Daily Hampshire Gazette* 03/18/2010

If Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez is the literary master of the concept of magical realism, painter and

There, gallery director Rich Michelson says, Standley focuses intently on his craft.

Standley is one of very few non-local artists represented by the gallery. "He's amazingly talented," said Michelson.

Michelson says some patrons have remarked that Standley's paintings seem to stare back at them. "The more you look, the more you see," he said.

His portrayals of water are particularly striking, as in the piece *Conference*, which depicts water running over pebbles in a stream. Standley expertly brings to life the water's fluid, rushing movement and crystalline quality, and gives just as much attention to the contours of each and every little stone.

Going Home is an image of a winding, wooded path on a sunny day. The dappled sunlight peeping in through the forest's canopy beautifully conveys the warmth of a quiet summer day, and pays tribute to Standley's incredibly subtle, delicate and captivating use of light.

Vivid History

Trail of Tears, one of several works centered around the historic removal of the Cherokee and other Native

American tribes from the East, is one of the occasional paintings that does include people.

Commissioned by the Department of Arkansas Heritage in 1995, it is a vivid portrait of the government's expulsion of Native Americans from Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia and Alabama in the 1830s. Cherokee men, women and children travel down a long, muddied path surrounded by yellowed grass and barren trees—some in wagons, a handful atop horses and mules, and most on foot. Rifle-carrying soldiers monitor the journey; off to the side, two men lay down a companion who is either sick or already dead. In the foreground, an old woman wipes away a tear.

A large print of this painting is on display at R. Michelson Galleries; the original wall-sized mural is at the Bradley House Museum in Jasper, Arkansas.

The few engravings on

display at the gallery are just as breathtaking as his paintings. One entitled *Olympic Rain Forest Vision* offers a picture of the mossy base of a tree, and the surrounding bushes and plants that grow in its vicinity. The miniscule flower petals, leaves and texture of the piece call to mind the level of detail on a dollar bill.

Standley believes that nature is filled with spirits, Michelson explained, and that it is his job to help us see them, and to see what's really going on under the surface.

"What he's trying to communicate in his art is how we miss what goes on right in front of us," Michelson said.

It certainly seems as if Standley misses none of it.

R. Michelson Galleries is located at 132 Main St., Northampton. Gallery hours are Mondays through Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. For information, visit www.rmichelson.com or call 586-3964.



Max Standley, *The Umbrageous Clan*, oil on panel, 12" x 16"

engraver Max Standley is his artistic equivalent.

Like the author of such novels as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Standley's depictions of sweeping landscapes, the minutest details of nature, and everything in-between, manage to appear both fantastical and true to life.

An exhibit of Standley's latest work, *Max Standley: A Natural Vision*, is currently on display, through April 15, at R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton.

Standley lives with his wife on forty acres nestled deep in the forests of Arkansas, removed from the distractions of society and urban life.

His rich, vibrant, and incredibly detailed paintings and engravings of all aspects of nature merit patient observation, and revisits, for their seemingly infinite layers to reveal themselves. People appear very rarely in his work, but in every piece there are multitudes of faces, bodies and personalities disguised as stones, water, bark, sky or earth.

Though there are more and less prominent elements in his art, there is almost nothing that could be called a "background." Every aspect of the whole appears equally important, and there are secrets to be found at every turn.

Left: Max Standley, *Daredeviltry*, oil on panel, 28" x 30"

Right: *The Eternal Quest*, oil on panel, 20" x 30"

