Lowly resume

Peripheral Vision: The Paintings of Tim Lowly
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Tim Lowly is an expressly contemporary representational painter. Appearing conservative, his understated scenes, however, embrace the subversive potential of a genre that has historically been defined by the regimented order of tradition. Since the early '90s, Lowly has established himself as a significant contributor to realism with his own peculiar deconstruction of the prosaic qualities of the natural world. His sensitive paintings, which often focus on his family (most notably his daughter, Temma Day), transform the apparently discarded stillness surrounding everyday life into a tangible entity. This unseen presence serves as a life affirming conduit - emotionally, psychologically, spiritually--between people and the physical environments or social interactions from which they feel separated.

Yet, while Lowly's eloquent articulations of these hushed experiences display his consummate drawing and painting skills, his works avoid the pitfalls of sentimentality. He resists the belief that absolute truths are contained in a finite realm of details. Instead, his compositions suggest that an expanded sense of "reality" is located in the ever-shifting gray areas between how we see ourselves and how the world perceives us. The resulting strange "ordinariness" that permeates his paintings reveals that he cares as much, if not more, about calling our attention to the act of looking, as he does about the subject of our attention. Lowly goes against the grain of realism's linear way of perception by implying that a fuller awareness of the world lies outside the boundaries of each person's direct line of sight.

On first viewing, Lowly's paintings appear to depict people inhabiting familiar but nevertheless unusual places: an aging woman sits on the banks of a desolate, urban estuary; a sick man emerges from the darkness of a dimly lit intensive care unit; an angelic young girl lays amidst the prickly weeds of an empty field. While aspects of these images appear grounded in observation, they retain a quality that moves them beyond the act of witnessing an actual event. A more accurate interpretation of these thoughtfully composed scenes is that they make visible the invisible places that people create within themselves. This distinction is important in understanding the tangible connections between Lowly's figures and large open spaces--the sky, ground, walls and floors--whose emptiness would otherwise seem to imply dislocation and loneliness. As a result, his people feel uniquely fused to worlds that are a distinctive extension of their souls. Lowly's works imply that in order to achieve a harmonious balance in a world that is beyond our control we must learn to always carry a unique sense of belonging inside us.

Temma on Earth is a poetic expression of internal travels viewed through external landscapes. It is a mural-sized painting that reveals Lowly's ability to elicit emotional tension out of the subtlest visual contradictions. In doing so, he transforms personal family experiences into universal, human metaphors. Reacting against convention, Lowly doesn't pose his

daughter in a traditional landscape composition of a person standing against the horizon. Rather, he graphically depicts Temma as seen from the aerial perspective of a satellite image. Lit by an even, overcast light, she calmly rests on her side in an unkempt plot of land. She is surrounded by an expanse of dried earth and foliage, drained of vivid color. Her peaceful expression seems at odds with the harshness of her surroundings. Though the heavy folds of her sweatshirt emphasize her horizontal contact with the ground, something else begins to occur. Despite her palpable inertia, she seems to have brokenfree of the earth's gravity. Traditional roles of land and sky have been reversed. The bleached, dried ground becomes luminously celestial as gravel is transformed into surrogate stars and tufts of isolated grass resemble mysterious galaxies. Physically one with the ground yet seeming to journey far away, weighted down while being lighter than air, Temma's image speaks to her ability to transcend her real life disabilities.

Working further to dissolve the borders between segregated worlds, Lowly increasingly filters out extraneous details from his compositions. The emotional associations of color have been replaced with the cool distance of a subdued palette. Suffused with silvery tones, his current works appear even more removed from the natural world. Resembling the black and white images of our dreams, his compositions create fluid exchanges between what is perceived as solid and that which is void. This is an important formal quality that elevates Lowly's private family moments closer to the universal vocabulary of sublime abstraction. An image of his dying father in a hospital bed becomes an animated topography of interlocking gray shapes. Lowly effectively uses ethereal fluorescent lighting to fuse the corporeal body with its clinical, geometric environment. Despite its intimate size, the image of Lowly's father, both confined by the failure of his body yet freed to merge with his surroundings on another metaphysical plane, echoes the liberation of his own disabled granddaughter from the constraints of the earth. Consequently, both paintings reveal Lowly's ability to see the confinements of realism as a necessary tool for subverting our acceptance of the world as we think it is, based on the limited nature of pre-conditioned ways of seeing.

Lowly's work has retained its vitality because he is a representational painter that has refused to become seduced by the fictions of appearances. That is not to say he doesn1t look intently at the world around him. To the contrary, his gaze pierces the layers of the physical world with a burning intensity that peels back its facades. But Lowly's scrutiny is also informed by firsthand experiences

with the fallibility of human communication and understanding rooted in the conventional laws of the physical world. For an artist who is guided by faith as much as intellect, the inequities of earthly existence can only be embraced as holding the potential keys to revealing who we are and where we belong.

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