

PAINTED LANDSCAPES

Contemporary Views

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CLAY WAGSTAFF

(B. 1964)

Clay Wagstaff paints the intimate places of his life, landscapes both of the familiar, physical world and of memory and intellect. Though painted with incredible detail and realistic in approach to rendering the natural landscape, Wagstaff's untouched places are imbued with soft light and washes of color that create environments at once peaceful and otherworldly, somehow unreal. There is a sense of detachment in the idealized beauty that also lends the paintings an air of the universal.

Though informed by experiences and real places where he has spent time out in the landscape, often quite close to home, Wagstaff's paintings transcend the physical space of Utah. He organizes his compositions, mostly straight-on views of flat, verdant landscapes with trees as protagonists at center, according to principles of Greek mathematical principles, thus creating visually balanced and harmonious formations. Earlier examples of seascapes, with tall rocks jutting from the grey-green waters in the middle of the compositions, are similarly grounded and ordered. The symmetry in the physical aspects of the paintings, such as the ring of exposed dirt encircling the central assembly of striking albino shade trees in *The Circle No. 6* (Fig. 11), underscores the importance of balance and ancient order in Wagstaff's compositions. In many of his works, the horizon line cuts across the center of the composition creating equal balance of land and sky between the upper and lower registers of the painting.

Wagstaff's landscapes are serene, cerebral places with vistas fading into the distance and trees populating the middle ground of the works. Capturing the soothing, more restful times of day, Wagstaff's paintings exist as daylight dawns or wanes, casting a soft light on a scene. There are no structures or evidence of man and population in his work, which enhances the feeling of the eternal and timelessness. The individual or clusters of trees, at the center of the canvases, become the focal point in the otherwise open views. The gnarled trunks or elaborate canopies of old-growth trees suggest that these are landscapes of the ancient world. The trees, though representative of the physical place, are also symbolic of an intellectual, emotional place as well. Wagstaff's spaces draw or pull the viewer into the space of the painting, enveloping us with a sense of well-being and of welcome solitude.

Wagstaff lives and works in Tropic, Utah. He received his MA in printmaking and MFA in painting and drawing from California State University, Long Beach, and his BFA in printmaking from Brigham Young University. His work is in the collection of the Springville Museum of Fine Art, Springville, Utah; the State of New Mexico's Art in Public Places collection; the State of Utah Fine Art collection, Salt Lake City; and the Salt Lake County art collection. He is represented by Selby Fleetwood Gallery, Santa Fe; David Erickson Fine Art, Salt Lake City; Terzian Galleries, Park City, Utah; Torrey Gallery, Torrey, Utah; and Sears Peyton Gallery, New York.



Fig. 10: Clay Wagstaff. *Dove Creek No. 21*, 2011. Oil on panel: 36 x 36.
Courtesy of Sears Peyton Gallery, New York.



Fig. 11: Clay Wagstaff. *The Circle No. 6*, 2011. Oil on canvas: 48 x 72.
Courtesy of Sears Peyton Gallery, New York.



Fig. 12: Clay Wagstaff. *Morning Breaks*, 2011. Oil on canvas: 48 x 72.
Courtesy of Sears Peyton Gallery, New York.