



Mary McIntyre: *Nightfall 1*, 2003, C.type photographic print on dibond, 83cm x 100cm; courtesy Golden Thread

*Nightfall 1*, 2003, is a captivating scene in which glistening blades of grass, the strands that comprise a cluster of reeds, details of the trees and the tiniest leaves are picked out by a luminous, melancholic moonlight. These things seem on the brink of becoming animated and strangely humanoid. Like in the other nocturnal photographs by Mary McIntyre in *The Long View*, an odd misty light is used to direct the eye and the sculptural qualities of shadow are exploited for photography, making an ordinary

place appear extraordinary and affecting. This is a painterly sort of photography which playfully explores the potential for landscape to be made to represent the psyche, flagging the operations of pathetic fallacy where difference is presented as sameness, in the sense that nature is attributed with human feelings.

McIntyre showed twenty-one recent works, which depict urban environments as well as a variety of landscapes lit by daylight or moonlight, taken in

various locations in Northern Ireland. The scenes are framed as the object of the artist's gaze and some are imbued with a keen sense of her as protagonist, in particular the nocturnal shots of urban environments. The photographs provoke an awareness of looking and, through formal devices, a sense of estrangement between viewer and image. Their estranging quality exposes a desire for settled meaning in landscape imagery – which at first seems to promise the reassuringly familiar.

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Exemplifying this simultaneously reassuring and unsettling quality of the works is a photograph of a pale-coloured horse. The animal stands to the right of centre against a darkening sky, in an image which evades being read in a conclusive way. The gap in the composition indicates where a figure could fit and possibly complete the image.

Additionally, the horse is turned towards the viewer as though it might encroach on the safe distance which separates both; while its off-centre position grants it an autonomy, signalling its ability to wander beyond the parameters of the lens.

The question of a completion of meaning in the images is linked to the absence and presence of the figure, in different ways. In the woodland images, their lack of the presence of a figure can be compensated for by attributing aspects of the scene with human characteristics; or by the sense of an immanent presence evoked by the eye being directed to illuminated sections of the composition. There are also photographs of male and female figures, in rustic landscapes and postindustrialised yet picturesque vistas of rivers which reflect trees and a huge, bulbous cloud formation. It is these photographs that could be expected to provide an image wherein meaning is complete: allegorical figures in a variation on the ideal Romantic landscape. The allegorical figure in the landscape is traditionally used to describe an ideological or philosophical position about identity. But here such determined meaning is difficult to read because the relationship between figures and landscape is ambiguous. In *Untitled 2 (after Caspar David Friedrich)*, 2003, a photograph of a woman walks into the distance; the shadow of the pathway she appears to forge through the grass emphasises presence and movement. But the eye is simultaneously directed to the buildings on the horizon, by the vertical line of a stream. A minute helicopter in the sky bring other possible meanings. This photograph could make for a variety of readings, including ones which consider its location in Northern Ireland, but moreover, it is the potential for landscape imagery to connote multiple meanings that these images of flux play upon, beautifully.

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