

LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

555 East Second St. | South Boston, MA 02127

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joe Wardwell
Big Disgrace

On View:

March 3rd – April 11th, 2010

Opening Reception:

March 3rd, 6 – 8 pm



LaMontagne Gallery is proud to present “Big Disgrace,” a body of Joe Wardwell’s newest work. In these paintings Wardwell creates landscapes sourced from images of the Pacific Northwest and New England. In the compositions, he takes great liberties with the scenery and the landscapes; editing man’s imprint of roads, power lines, fences, buildings, and adding mountains, lakes, and fauna in its place. In creating these images, Wardwell searches for an archetype landscape image as opposed to recreating an authentic image of a particular place or recreating a specific experience. His work focuses on both landscape image as cultural symbol and landscape painting as a cultural signifier. As a result, images of sunsets, waterfalls, and snowy mountaintops run throughout the paintings. Wardwell draws inspiration for these landscape archetypes from Hudson River School painters, especially from the works of Albert Beirstadt and Frederic Church. He brings attention to how landscape painting and our understanding of landscape has been historically linked to a defining of national identity in the United States. From the early imperial advocates of Manifest Destiny adopting the great pictures of the Hudson River School to today’s “true” American advertising of beer and truck ads with a snowy cap on every beer can or a rugged terrain in every commercial, landscape and the American brand go hand and hand.

“It is my goal in the paintings to point out these changing histories and identities. By painting text into the landscapes I create a juxtaposition between imagery and text to subvert the images of landscape and their associative connotations towards national identity and suggest an alternative narrative and imply meanings.” Wardwell states. The suggestions in Wardwell’s paintings offer a contemplative, nihilistic, foreboding and oblique interpretation. Though forceful and political in nature, the text and image allude to meaning but not dictate. His paintings assimilate the formal compositions of advertising or propaganda but what exactly is being sold or preached is uncertain. The texts are applied to the painting through a variety of techniques such as hand painted letters, silkscreen, or stencils. Initially inspired by silkscreen rock posters, the painting of the text creates an additional picture plane that is separate from the landscape. The letters and paint that create them function as not only text but as abstract shapes and compositions on the canvases. The texts used in the paintings are all from fragments of lyrics of rock songs. The music is culled from a range across rock and roll’s long history stemming from such classic bands as “The Doors”, to early punk groups such as “The Damned,” to 90’s indie rock such as “Nirvana” or “Sonic Youth”. Their music is woven into the cultural history as succinctly as the landscape images underneath. When stripped of their original context, in all of the texts selected, there is the sense of portraying an alternative American cultural consciousness or counter cultural consciousness.

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 12 - 6 pm | (617) 464 – 4640
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