

Jacci Den Hartog's exhibition at Rosamund Felsen Gallery reviewed by Paul Foss for ArtUS, 2010.



In Esquire's "It's Impossible" special issue, ' published this August, some of the examples they give are licking your elbow, driving under the speed limit, balancing the federal budget, and so forth. Yet other advice is spot-on, like the impossibility of starting a good story with "This morning in spin class," or of constructing the perfect English sentence, though that doesn't prevent them from offering, as close to the mark, Don DeLillo's "Nothing you can believe is not coming true."

A trace of this aporia can be found in Jacci den Hartog's new body of work at Rosamund Felsen, called "Coming Down' (through August 14). Comprised of eight large wall-hung sculptures or "paintings," as well as a number of smaller studies on paper, the show neither comes down from the heights Hartog has habitually climbed (as in Moving Mountain and Landscape in the Manner of Old Masters from 1995-96), nor entirely gets over what nowadays increasingly stands in nature's way or runs down or away with it. Perspective is a big part of the story, as these representative peaks seem disproportionately tiny or distant compared to their-multicolored, cascading, serpentine dissolution.

Constructed from paper-based modeling polymer, their brightly tinted twists and turns are scored with thick faux brush marks. The airy sculptures are attached via steel braces to the wall, whereupon they could be Japanese ukiyo-e prints or Smithsonian earthworks suddenly come to life. Glacial Speed (2008), for instance, shows a retreating glacier, its deeply scoured runnel awash with swiftly flowing ice melt, or else its stony aftermath. The show's standout title work, emerging downwards and outwards from a mountaintop against a wall into the gallery space, culminates in a vast concourse of rainbow-colored runoff or rubble, whose environmental impact seems almost universal. Day Hike (2008-09) exits from high

up on the wall and rejoins it far below, like repeated wear-and-tear that ultimately loops back on itself. Trip to Big Sur (2009) and Driving Through Utah (2010) don't directly represent water, but they might be said to imply past activity or an ongoing absence.

Hartog's soulful, yet magnificent specters demonstrate how the very fabric of nature has been invaded by artificiality, in mimicry of the junk littered across the landscape, to become counterfeit in return. Yet for all its rhetorical beauty, her work contains an important formal element as well. All this up-and-down, in-and-out toing and froing is fairly difficult to parse, yet affirmation can't so easily be contrasted with pure negation, as the sentence from DeLillo's Underworld (1997) attests. What his words systematically subvert is the principle that truth is always a matter of belief, or vice versa. Grammatically speaking, the double negative inflects or "declines," namely erases what the words themselves deny, both circuitously refusing and confirming their claim. Neither strictly sculpture nor painting, hanging nor freestanding, kitsch nor cant, the art of Jacqui den Hartog reveals, like the perfect sentence, a twist in every turn it takes.

-Paul Foss

ArtUS, 2010