

Magic And Meaning Blossom In The Work of Artist Nathaniel Galka

APRIL 22, 2020

By Thomas Connors



"it is our playground..." oil on marble plaster panel with gold leaf, 2019.

From Marcel Duchamp to Damian Hirst (and long before) art history has been a tale of transgressions, a series of eye-poking gestures that sent critics and curators up the wall and the public scratching their heads. But going against the grain doesn't always involve bifurcating a bovine. Doing your own thing, quietly, can be subversive in a world in which spectacle is often the surest route to success.



“the calm protested with the white eyes cry...” oil on marble plaster linen jutel, 2019.

Coming of age in the 1990s, when easel painting had long been eclipsed by video, performance, and installation, artist [Nathaniel Galka](#) knew he was going to have to forge his own path. “I felt the art world had changed to a free-for-all,” he says. “Nothing was beautiful anymore and that was extreme saddening to me.”

Representation isn't anathema to Galka, but he doesn't render the world as we see it. Guided by the great painterly traditions of the past (from French classicism to East Asian Sumi-e) but not constrained by them, he merges the recognizable with the uncertain, creating images that please the eye but leave the mind wondering. There's an almost Sung Dynasty-meets-Max Ernst quality to his nature-driven canvases, where birds and butterflies float and perch amid whirling tendrils of vegetation. Exuberantly fantastical, but a smidge upsetting, these works are not wholly Edenic, nor utterly apocalyptic. There is splendor in this grass, but a worm in the apple.



"groving on lemon branches..." oil on marble plastered panel, 2019.

"My paintings imply how the human hand is creating a false ecosystem and destroying our planet, starting in our own backyards," states the artist. "We are taking away what is indigenous and replacing it with 'ornamental' plantings. We are destroying the natural order of our own landscape. I am creating 'post-human gardens', works about how nature will reclaim its balance once we are no longer here manipulating our planet."