



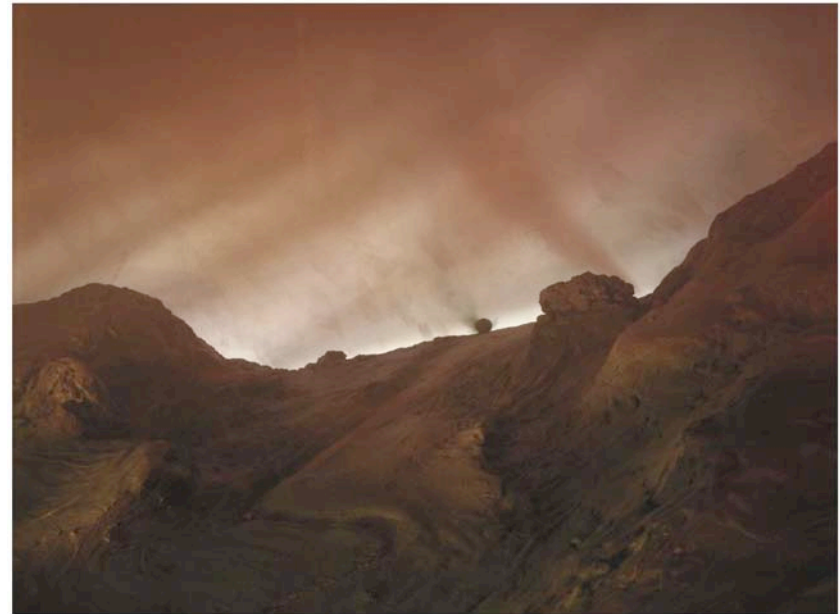
Synthetic Realism

Kim Keever's earlier images of geological formations were dramatic, even romantic; they seemed to seek the origins of the world. Keever created them by photographing large, dramatically lit plaster-of-paris setups in his studio. Photos such as *Buried Dreams* (1993) and *Yellow River* (1996) took the viewer through grottoes and caves. Their lush coloring and fantasyland quality made one think of the Tunnel of Love or of Jules Verne's journey to the Center of the Earth. These images screamed artifice, yet they managed to remain as mysterious as they were knowable.

Keever's latest work seems more realistic- and also more ineffable. At times, it appears that Keever got very "lucky"-as Ansel Adams did with his views of the moon over New Mexico in capturing dramatic atmospheric effects: the sun, for instance, striking distant clouds high in the mountains. While some viewers will no doubt be convinced that they are being transported to heights of natural sublimity, the truth is that these new images are as artificial as the earlier ones. For these, Keever submerged a plaster model into a tank of water, then added dyes (the model itself is on view in the back gallery). The result is a deeper immersion in artifice that greatly enhances Keever's hold on the viewer. Far from being disappointed that something like *Girl on a Road* was all done with water, light and dyes, one is amazed.

Keever titles this exhibit "Synthetic Realism" -a nod, perhaps, to the fact that the best photos are imbued with a transcendental quality that blurs the difference between artificial and real. In the end, photography is about imagination, and Keever demonstrates plenty of it with this accomplished show.

-Robert Mahoney



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