

***Romancing the tones***

By Jeffrey Cyphers Wright

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*In his deftly orchestrated dioramas shot in a fish tank, Kim Kever seduces us with his gorgeous version of 'Nature'.*

Kim Kever's landscapes are rife with anticipation, as if a deity were about to step out from behind the backdrop of overarching clouds and announce an eternal free lunch. Unabashedly handsome, even majestic, they are nevertheless mysterious, moody and perhaps a bit malevolent (in a good way!). Wagnerian. Except there are no humans. We are seemingly either in a primordial Eden or a post-apocalyptic pastoral.

Immediately, these large, horizontal photographs evoke such luminaries as Church and Bierstadt, the Hudson River School and their predecessors, David Casper Friedrich and the German Romantics. Kever's photos hearken back to an era when nature was pristine and seemed vast while still capable of being haunting. There was no irony in the optimism it inspired. Kever's own Romanticism is writ large in these exuberant raptures. Delightfully so. The golds and blues are emblematic of nature and the idealism that realm inhabits in our minds. In "Summer: Blue, Yellow and Gray," a sunset (or is it a fire?) worthy of an Hawaiian shirt or a Bollywood poster emblazons the sky while in the foreground bent trees belie the seeming serenity. An uncanny sense of imminent kinetic energy lurks just under the surface. Nature is bipolar. Any moment, all hell could break loose.



Summer: Blue, Yellow and Gray, 2004, C-print

And further undercutting the confection, dark marks mar the trans-serene settings — like scratches and scrapes on a negative, or perhaps scars on an old painting or ink on an engraving. They're actually caused by scum! Yes, because Kever takes pictures of his constructs in an

aquarium. Over the years a film has built up on the glass.

Finally, the succulent, almost palpable energy is created when he pours the pigment into the water. Colored lights complete the compelling illusion. Realizing that these realistic landscapes aren't real is half the fun. Finding out they're submerged is too much! Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ" with all its scandal comes to mind.



View of artist's studio set-up

There is something a little sacrilegious about Kever's seeming deception. And yet that is the glorious salvation of this art. Kever has made exquisite concoctions that move with jewel precision. But he has provided a seamy side that expresses our time's concerns over the ruination of nature. So here we have it both. The sublime and the subterranean.

In "July 3," we see a boulder-strewn declivity sprawled between jagged cliffs. The foreground is flooded. Lightening seems to filter through a writhing turmoil of atmosphere as if it were the trumpet section of the Berlin Philharmonic. The blues and blacks roil like wraiths above Macbeth's witches' cauldron. The scum marks are significant. They add an element of frost or decay, appearing to fluctuate between background and fore.

As the elements duel in their eternal struggle, we fathom our profound solitude from a vantage of blissful negligence. The stagy darkness in "July 3" adds just the right amount of ballast to carry this brilliant show to new heights — or depths!