

Review: Katherine Taylor ponders man's relationship to nature in gorgeous landscapes at Marcia Wood Gallery

By CHRISTINA COTTER | Feb 17, 2012

Order. Destruction. Reclamation. This seems to be the cycle in areas that experience natural disaster. The order that humans bring to the landscape is often a temporary one, and one that must be repeatedly re-established after natural forces wreak their havoc.



Katherine Taylor's "Encroachment"

A native of Biloxi, Mississippi, and witness to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Katherine Taylor is acutely aware of this process, and it informs her work. "Firmament," an exhibition of her new body of abstract landscape paintings at [Marcia Wood Gallery](#) through March 10, suggests this cycle in still, frozen moments fraught with an intense sense of place.

Employing the many technical skills in her arsenal, Taylor is able to tease out the maximum impact with the smallest of gestures. Her calm landscapes and placid, cloud-filled vistas are rendered with a minimum of recognizable elements. Often, a strong horizon line is the only anchor between earth, water and sky, a reference point that allows the eye to play between these planes. Her economy creates the illusion of space and atmosphere while exposing the actual physicality of the paint and brushstrokes. One is reminded of Germaine de Staël, Gerhard Richter and Mark Rothko.

In the series "Onement," for example, cloudscape are reduced to a swath of pigment across a blurred suggestion of a sky. Taylor's masterful handling of her medium gives these small paintings a strong sense of depth and presence.



Taylor's "Easement 20"

"Easements," a group of paintings no larger than six by eight inches, offers details of human intrusion: misty clouds hanging over water-inundated roadways, the linear geometry of new construction. Although these images point to some of the grim realities of the urban landscape in their tone, subject matter and starkly neutral palette, they are stunningly gorgeous in their execution.

The effect is equally dramatic in "Encroachment." Thick smears of oil paint denote a ruined cityscape on the razor's edge of a large body of water seen from an aerial perspective. The painting is expansive, meditative and somehow timeless, distilling the paradox of our imposed order. Although seemingly permanent, our marks upon the landscape eventually may be altered by the elements. Taylor's gestural mark-making seems to echo this sentiment. There is no attempt to conceal the movement of her strokes; they are the medium and the message. It's a powerful trick to turn.

Other works here, rendered on squares of etched aluminum, have a printmaker's feel. The slick surface allows the artist to manipulate her paint with even more plasticity, and its reflectiveness creates another layer of false dimension; the planes of paint seem to hover as if suspended.



Taylor's "Impluvium"

While Taylor's landscapes never depict the human figure, they continually evoke humanity's efforts to harness nature. The "Impluvium" series continues the narrative thread. Empty swimming pools are denoted by the image of handrails that lead the eye into empty rectangles flanked by concrete. In some, the pool's horizon line competes with the actual horizon of a natural body of water beyond, a distinction that points to mankind's desire to create a contained and controlled version of the other.

In their references to gritty artificiality, these images are tinged with a kind of post-industrial melancholy. One feels that the "swimmers" are absent for a reason. Taylor has rendered the mundane with a touch of the sublime.