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## Greg Lindquist

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ARTSEEN

WEBEXCLUSIVE

## GREG LINDQUIST: *Of ash and coal*

by William Corwin

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*Belews Creek Steam Station, Stokes County, North Carolina (Transmission Towers)*, 2018, 30 x 46", oil, acrylic, and ash on linen

Greg Lindquist, a painter and regular *Brooklyn Rail* contributor, constructs an image cycle of social inequity in the face of environmental desecration, playing a requiem above a baseline of spoilt nature caused by corporate self-interest. Titled *Of ash and coal*, his series of expansive vistas depicts devastated homes, churches, and communities against a backdrop of the industrial structures and processes that have caused their agony. Lindquist's obsession with a Claude-like sense of view is magnified by his alienating sense of color (much like that produced using a Claude glass), use of multiple and layered identical images, and slightly off-kilter or literal frames painted into the picture plane. It is as if we were being held by the hand and guided through some Capability Brown-designed dystopian garden masterpiece.

The landscape as a genre has always been a sounding board from which we bounce notions of ourselves. Whether it is an Arcadian myth of poetry and intimacy with the land as in Poussin, or a somewhat more skeptical intermingling of social commentary and the pastoral, like Watteau; a framework of green fields and wooded interludes never fails to heighten our oscillating sense of self-hatred or self-worth as the planet's dominant species. "Rain, Steam and Speed—the Great Western Railway" is J.M. Turner's optimistic testimony to the marvels of modern technology in 1844. Via grays, blacks and browns, the English artist perhaps tosses in a hint of criticism for the environmental downsides of technological progress. Lindquist's *Belews Creek Steam Station, Stokes County, North Carolina (Transmission, Towers)* (2018) employs a similarly wide-ranging perspective, foregrounding the painting with an electrical tower which guides the eye to a distant power plant on the horizon. But Lindquist reverses Turner's message. He has digested the naïve optimism for technological potential and the end-result is a bleak but lyrical palette of muted greens, yellows, and ochres. The choo-choo has run out of steam.

Are these images hopeless or is there some kind of redemption possible? Is a silver lining required in landscape painting? The chimneys, cooling towers, and plants which populate and corrupt Lindquist's southern paradise are malevolent, horrendous blots. They contaminate his palette—figuratively, with their baleful hues and tints, and literally, with ash mixed in with the paints—but they are never called out as



*Duke Energy's Dan River I*, 2014, 68 x 78", oil on canvas

*Energy's Dan River I* (2014) posits identical chartreuse and violet tree trunks against a mostly white and yellow background, instigating a flickering optical sensation and imposing an impression of the mechanical and chemical onto a sylvan theme.

Lindquist distills the image of the landscape down into a lithographic approximation to achieve a succinct impression of space. He also references the optical afterimages that float across the retina when we shut our eyes by making the entire positive image in a frame a single color. But these are paintings, not prints or digital entities, and as creations of brush, pigment, and linen they enjoy a symbiotic relationship with the artist's intellectual interpretation of his subject matter. His brackish and contaminated locales bear the traces of the artist's hand and inflections of gesture and demeanor, opening up a conversation about the nature of literal and metaphorical human intrusion in the environment. These paintings are gritty, dirty even. The skies in *Plant Bowen, Euharlee, Georgia (Euharlee Baptist Church)* (2017) and *Robert W Scherer Power Plant, Juliette, Georgia* (2017) are literally streaked with the lines of the brush-hairs drawn across the top of the canvas, incorporating the modulations of clouds, the presence of pollution in the atmosphere, and the mark of the artist, recalling the open brushwork and liquid skeins of color of Ellen Phelan's Adirondack landscapes. Lindquist, in his way, both condemns our presence and then weaves our traces into the cloth of the environment. Much of landscape painting wells up from a desperate desire to picture bucolic settings, perhaps even Eden; Lindquist by comparison seems content to rhapsodically lament the current purgatory we have gotten ourselves into.

eyesores within the anatomy of the picture. As compositional elements, they balance with the vegetation and fulfill the visual requirements of the horizon: they are well-integrated points of intensity and interest. In *Plant Bowen, Euharlee, Georgia (Tobacco Fields)* (2017) a pyramid of light that is a receding path finds its destination beyond a copse of trees in the silhouettes of smokestacks and nuclear cooling towers looming against the sky, like some tragic Emerald City. Centered around the four slim chimneys and the bricklike rectangular massing of the plant building, the panoramic perspective of *River Bend Spring Station, Mount Holly, North Carolina* (2017) recalls the concise and honest narrative sweep of Rackstraw Downes. At times, Lindquist's technological imagery is imitated by the natural. The artist's utilization of doubled and layered images creates doppelgangers of trees, shrubs, and forest detritus which mirror the repetitive architecture of power plants with their multiple chimneys. *Duke*