

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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Greg Lindquist

Malone, Peter. "Paintings of Toxic Landscapes Where Politics and Aesthetics Are in Perfect Balance" Hyperallergic, March 13th, 2018.

<https://hyperallergic.com/432354/greg-lindquist-lennon-weinberg-landscape-paintings-environmentalism-review/>

HYPERALLERGIC



"Plant Bowen, Euharlee, Georgia, (Tobacco Fields)" (2017), oil acrylic and ash on linen, 20 ¼ x 28 ¼"

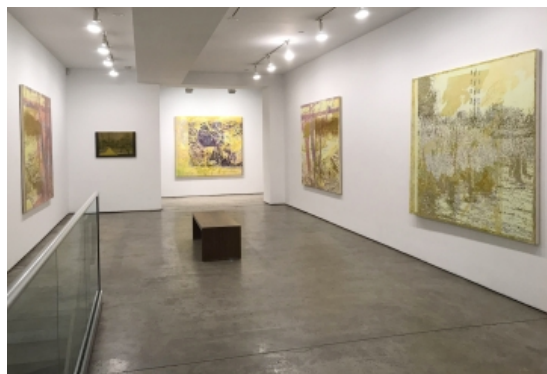
A selection of paintings by Greg Lindquist on view at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc. demonstrates how an artist may prevail over the challenges of fitting an aesthetic sensibility to the requirements of a political issue without sacrificing one for the other. It's not easy to overcome the inevitable imbalance that develops between one's passion for art and for a forensic purpose to which that art may be committed. In a static medium like painting, the aesthetic and the forensic will inevitably compete for that medium's limited conceptual space. Typically, attempts to bring both art and message to maximum effectiveness end with either an aesthetically weak but effective political message (see Ai Weiwei's *Laundromat*), or a visually compelling work that expresses little polemic nuance beyond commonly held postures (as in any of Robert Motherwell's elegies to the Spanish Republic).

Many artists willing to assume this most difficult of studio ambitions end up producing one or the other. And though I might hold a minority view regarding the significance of keeping the two

in balance — admittedly, much political art draws accolades on the merits of its position alone — the success of an artist in keeping both art and argument vital in a single work is a rare accomplishment worthy of note.

Of Ash and Coal, the title Lindquist gives to this small selection that actually represents an expansive and longitudinal project, belongs on the short list of art that manages to meld the complexity of its form with that of its argument. In addressing the issue of air and water pollution from coal-powered plant emissions, Lindquist offers images addressing environmental concerns that work on several levels beyond the project's symbolic mixing of coal ash into the paint. The project sustains both emotional and intellectual resonance by a multiplicity of strategies, including the landscape genre itself, recognition of the sociological realities of land development, and by the artist's coming to terms with stickier issues like an indirect complicity in the addressed vice. With a pronounced reliance on technology, presumably powered by the very facilities under scrutiny in his work, Lindquist completes an intriguing cycle of interdependent perspectives that keep art, science, and politics on an equal footing.

The work Lindquist shows in this exhibition is absorbed in stages, the first related to aspects of the landscape that surrounds power plants. Viewers are made immediately aware of the unflattering viewpoints from which he composes his scenes. A modest residence in the right foreground of "Plant Bowen, Euharlee, Georgia (Tobacco Fields)" (2017), suggests how the location of industrial facilities reduces the value of the land surrounding them, thus encouraging those with the least financial flexibility to consider living in dangerous proximity to their smokestacks.



Installation view of Greg Lindquist's *Of Ash and Coal*

In the smaller paintings, his approach is conventional but for the color. The ordinariness of "Plant Bowen's" mid-canvas horizon and classical proportionality is undermined by a sooty ground that harmonizes perversely with the raw linen support. A sizing medium made of coal-ash and acrylic establishes an acrid key signature the artist follows

consistently in his subsequent color choices. The coal ash, collected one assumes with unsettling ease in and around the site of the Belews Creek Steam Station in Lindquist's native North Carolina, along with the off-putting greens and yellows layered onto it, behave, according to Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco's catalogue essay, like aposematic color: color designed in the Darwinian sense of the term, to warn predators of an organism's poisonous attributes. Though bright oranges and yellows are preferred by the graphic designers of our own species (danger signs, hunter's jackets, etc.), the choice of weirdly unnatural greens speaks to the insidious invisibility of the landscape's toxicity.



"Duke Energy's Dan River VI" (2014), oil on canvas, 68 x 78 in

The second group of canvases on view consists of larger, strangely decorative paintings that direct one's gaze to the ground rather than the horizon. For instance, in "Duke Energy's Dan River I" (2014), one's attention is drawn to the rippling surface of a river's presumably fouled waters. In contrast to the smaller pictures, the larger paintings prove subtle in their aposematic signaling, as they introduce Impressionist-like violets and mauves to their predominant yellows. Along with a raised horizon that mimics the sky/earth hybrid of Monet's *Waterlilies*, they appear at first glance to be abstract, an idea exploited further by layering color in frames of collage-like subdivisions that give each of the larger canvases a greater artificiality, a falseness that fails to cohere much like a Warhol silkscreen's resistance to cohesion. In Lindquist's work, however, intuitive offsets imply nature's inability to absorb the offending material.

One of the more compelling aspects of the work is the artist's use of photo projection. Though there are practical reasons for his choosing digital technology, and to be sure photographic computer applications provide marvelous tools for painters of all stripes, his use of software and optical projectors adds conceptual breadth to the work by addressing the unavoidable fact that his studio method incorporates electricity likely produced by an offending plant. Whether a viewer interprets this paradox as careless hypocrisy, a fatal flaw in the artist's thesis, or a nod to an inconvenient reality is up for grabs. What I find appealing about it is the way it points to an interconnectedness fundamental to the issue of environmental pollution. Every aspect of these paintings — their color, their relationship to landscape painting and to modernism, their symbolism, their journalistic extrapolation, even the process of their construction — speaks to a stubbornly common public issue with an effectively open-minded tone: no harangues, no hyperbole, and simple, honest painting.

Greg Lindquist's Of Ash and Coal continues at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc. (514 West 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through April 14.