



: artist profile **daniel dove**



Few painters wed representation and abstraction as astutely as Daniel Dove. His works depict cryptic landscapes—from decaying factories and urban streetscapes to eerie outdoor scenes—which often serve as backdrops for boldly abstract elements at their center. In a way, his approach echoes the so-called ‘Leipzig School,’ a group of young German painters who, as admirers of Gerhard Richter, attempt to till new soil by marrying Richter’s end-game experiments with abstraction and representation. But Dove’s works also have their own very American component, seeking out the sort of atmospherically anonymous places that inspired Edward Hooper, updating them to the exurbs, and utilizing that most urban American mark-making form of graffiti. “The graffiti element is such a strong signifier in terms of class, but it also softens the hard edges of a building, makes it fluid and gestural,” he says. It appeals to him because “I try to make an illusionistic thing act like an abstract element. Or the other way around...” he adds, half-joking.

Born in Austin, Texas, Dove studied at Yale and eventually ended up in Cleveland. “It’s a very strange place,” he observes. “It’s essentially a dying city. Everywhere there’s a past grandeur,

and that grandeur's tied to an industry. There are an incredible number of grand utilitarian structures that have been abandoned. It really sensitized me to place."

In his recent two-person show with New York painter Tom McGrath at Cherry and Martin this spring, Dove offered several works that seemed to revel in the dynamic tug-of-war between landscape and abstraction, between representation, mark-making, and pure form. Yet for all their fetishism of deterioration and decay, they also imply a haunting aspiration for transcendence.

In "Wireherd," a flock of festive wire deer stands before a glowing tent, which is festooned with strings of lights and surrounded by faceless buildings. In "Public Sculpture," a blocky red line recalling a descending stock market graph—based on an actual sculpture by Tony Smith in downtown Cleveland—stands intact before an imploding edifice. "The cultural artifacts remain," Dove explains, while "the economic ones are demolished." In several other paintings, factory pipes and vents reminiscent of Charles Sheeler vie with graffiti or other abstract elements. In "Eye of Providence," Citgo gas sign half-buried in a factory basement erupts into a graceful rusty red swirling pattern, while nearby pipes face into elegant, soot-gray brushstrokes. The design is based on the pyramid on the back of the dollar bill. It's "a symbol of transcendent power, built out of all this refuse, all this junk."

Since 2005, Dove has lived in San Luis Obispo, Calif., where he teaches at Cal Poly. His painting "Renovation of Restoration," his first inspired by the California landscape, depicts a pair of futuristic parabolic arches, wrapped in scaffolding, and holding a knot of gray brushstrokes, like captive energy, amidst a pastoral gold and green vista. "I imagined that the scaffolding was put up for restoration and got abandoned," he muses. The work seems vaguely futuristic and nostalgic all at once, hovering guilelessly between landscape, fictive invention, and abstraction.

"It can become a very strange synthesis of irony and impulse," he muses. "How you can come right to the verge of something breaking apart into collage, and still make it...unified? I guess that's the big question mark." The question remains unresolved, but in Dove's hands, it proves a sturdy foundation for a tantalizing, highly engaging balancing act.

—George Melrod