

New York artist Christopher Astley showcases an alternative natural world

At Martos Gallery in New York, Christopher Astley's paintings evoke an alternative natural world and the chaos of warfare (until 16 March 2024)



Left, Christopher Astley and right, Christopher Astley, *Seven Years Below H*, 2019. Oil and Gesso on a wood panel. Courtesy of Stephen Johnson (Image credit: Courtesy of Stephen Johnson)

Martos Gallery offers a slice of serenity in the heart of New York with its latest exhibition, Christopher Astley's 'Terrain'. Paintings from the artist's eponymous new series, accompanied by a selection of previous works, offer a moment to ponder and admire the visual language that hints at countryside landscapes and clusters of forestry.

The *Terrain* series (2020, ongoing) utilizes oil paints to create a depth that imitates a collage-like landscape. By using varying hues of green, Astley creates a camouflaged world in which the subject matter isn't obvious. The bird's-eye view suggests, at first, identifiable trees,

paths, fields and hills, yet the angular shapes give the series an abstract feel. Astley has presented an alternative natural world that juxtaposes neatly with Martos Gallery's urban location.



Christopher Astley, *Terrain #3*, 2022. Oil and Gesso on wood panel (Image credit: Photography: Stephen Kent Johnson)

The inspiration for these paintings came from the experiences Astley had working in college with individuals who had suffered head injuries, which affected verbal and visual comprehension. This impacted how the artist wanted to present the natural world, which can be seen in different ways, dependent on the viewer.

The collage technique within the paintings adds a rendered texture, allowing the viewer to wonder if the imagery is computer-generated. The series' imaginative aspects are further emphasized by the fact that Astley produced the works in a windowless studio, with no physical green space to reference.



Installation view, 'Christopher Astley: Terrain' at Martos Gallery (Image credit: Photography: Stephen Kent Johnson)

Astley says, 'I am very interested in the underlying nature of reality and the way that people perceive the world. To me, collage is very similar to the way that people actually see things. We take in fragments of information through our eyes and senses, and our brain fills in the gaps to make the world make sense and appear seamless.'

'The basic themes in the *Terrain* paintings have to do with nature and the way we use our minds to collage together the image of a forest or a landscape using fragments of what we see, knowledge that we've acquired, and our imagination. In these paintings, pieces of tree and bush-like shapes are stitched together, with painted hash marks that fill in gaps where there is little information.'

'In the white paintings in the series, I was particularly interested in when people have trouble mentally putting things together or remembering. Like when people have dementia, a stroke or are simply becoming old.'



Christopher Astley, *Terrain #1*, 2022. Oil and Gesso on wood panel (Image credit: Photography: Stephen Kent Johnson)

The exhibition also showcases Astley's previous work *Seven Years Below* (2017-2019), which is a stark contrast to the green landscapes. The series, featuring abstract earth tones, with gentle hints of red and blue, represents battles that emulate the chaos, brutality and irrationality of war.

Scenes with swirling blues and browns mirror past conflicts at sea, amid cannons and ships' masts. These are history paintings for Astley, 'where the subject is not a particular event or cast of historical figures but rather the mechanism of history itself'.



Christopher Astley, *Seven Years Below A*, 2020. Oil and Gesso on wood panel (Image credit: Photography: Stephen Kent Johnson)

'Christopher Astley: Terrain' is on view at Martos Gallery in New York until 16 March 2024

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BY TIANNA WILLIAMS