

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

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Paul Winstanley
Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand



Known for his paintings based on photographs of uninhabited interiors and landscapes, British painter Paul Winstanley has been doing basically the same thing for a long time. Artspace's retrospective, 'Paul Winstanley: Paintings 1989-2007', successfully highlights the rewards of this consistency. From one of the earliest paintings in the show, Lobby No. 2 (1989), to several works created since the artist visited Beijing in 2006, the finegrained richness of individual pieces is revealed in the overarching project.

Winstanley works with a range of subtle effects taken from photographic technologies. Particularly notable are the digital-like shifts in saturation that play out over a number of the works, where it sometimes feels, when walking from one canvas to the next, as though the brightness has been turned up on the world. This is particularly vivid in the 'Night Walkway' series (2004-ongoing), which depicts an empty pedestrian tunnel receding into the distance. Drained of colour, the artificial light from fluorescent lamps travels across the steel and glass construction, drawing our eyes along the empty passage.

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The unpeopled photographs have an overall atmosphere of suspense – from images of lobbies, viewing platforms and offices, to forests and mountain scenes – Winstanley’s pared back representations of these common spaces are imbued with potential through the artist’s careful blanking out of activity. Characteristic of such non-places is a feeling of passing both on and through, of hurrying from one place to the next. What Winstanley does is to pause, and with this chance for contemplation his vacant sites reveal an unexpected familiarity. Through their likeness to locations we may have inhabited, they operate as types of places rather than unique examples, potential spaces for collective memory.

This sense of the general is borne out in the recent, smaller landscape studies, whose contrast with the interiors is of special interest here. Operating more like snapshots, these images are in fact mostly sourced from Winstanley’s trips to Finland and China, offering transitory glimpses of the outdoors. Typically unremarkable in their view of the natural world, these unconventional landscape paintings conjure a detachment similar to the mood indoors. *Yellow Mountain 1 & 2* (2006) detail an alpine terrain hovering in cloud and mist, resonating with the architectural blinds and veils (*Blind*, 2000 and *Veil 15*, 2005), while *Pines above Jiuhua Shan* (2006) traces the curve of a dirt path between trees, the washed-out daylight of its surrounds chiming with bright, blank windows.

Through the simple mechanism of bringing together a selection of works from the past two decades, the depth and breadth of Winstanley’s career is made palpable in a way that viewing these images individually could not. As backed up by the accompanying publication, *Threshold*, the accumulated paintings of Winstanley mediate many traditional concerns of image-making, showing it is not a question of what might be new to see here, but that there may be new ways to look.

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