

Art

Out of Town: art inspired by summer's desire to escape from the city

New York's Forum Gallery assembles pieces focused on the many joys of heading to nature from the urban world



Paul Fenniak - Excursion, 2013. Photograph: Paul Fenniak; courtesy of Forum Gallery, New York

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In part a fun way to offer a brief respite from summer in the city, and in part a thoughtful inquiry into just what role nature plays in artistic creation, Forum Gallery's summer exhibition *Out of Town* brings together nearly two dozen artists working in a wide variety of styles, reminding visitors of the rich variety of moods and emotions that come with venturing away from the city and off into nature.

The work here is pleasingly diverse. Be it closeups of the rocks on the Maine coast, a bowl of ripe olives and a Grecian urn overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, an eerie fusing of an artist's profile with the forking and multiplying branches of a tree, or abstract landscapes composed of layers of color, *Out of Town* offers multiple, and often surprising, points of entry to the sensation of being away.

For Nicola Lorenz, the Forum Gallery executive director, this is an exhibition that's all about artists who find their muse among the wilds. "Certain artists find spending time in nature to help them understand their emotions," she said in a video interview. "It's a space where we can be introspective and understand our emotions in a more meaningful way."

The artist William Beckman, who lends a huge self-portrait of himself in a brown overcoat and city clothes, standing heroic before a blackened plowed field, draws on an introspective relationship with nature that goes back to childhood. Growing up on a farm in Minnesota without electricity, Beckman's life became fused with the rhythms of the natural world and the effort of working the land. It is a clashing of city and country, a portrait of a man looking thoughtfully back to his roots, and a reminder that the wilds of

nature often only make space for human habitation after a significant effort and much fortitude.

"It's not always easy being in nature," commented Lorenz, "and it's not always easy being in the midst of the city, either."



📍 Linden Frederick - Sea Street, 2010.
Photograph: Linden Frederick; courtesy of
Forum Gallery, New York

portrays the bend in the road of a small north-eastern town, captures the moment when day is transitioning into night, infusing it with notes of mystery and narrative. It is, as others have noted, a Hopperesque scene full of possibility, like a summer night in which one's personal plotlines feel fuller and more compelling. The painting reminds viewers of how it feels when the days are noticeably longer, and consequently it feels like there is that much more life to be lived within them.

Tula Telfair offers two imagined landscapes to Out of Town, one of unbelievably fecund hills framed with majestic sweep, and one of a night-time cityscape seemingly seen from the inside of an airplane. "It's really that moment when you take off," said Lorenz of the latter, "literally the excitement of getting out of town." Telfair has stated that her work comes from memory - she does not paint from photographs or other representational aids - and she has explained her art as hoping to evoke memories in the viewer: "I am interested in the subjectivity of perception and the power of memory using illusion to trigger recollections of things past."

Telfair's pieces come from a series in which she painstakingly invents imaginary landscapes, and there is something about the invention here that makes these works particularly evocative of memories. Gazing on Telfair's works, the mind feels more open and more free, there is a sense that one's possibilities are more exciting. "They're looser because they're impressions," opined Lorenz, "they're captured memories and fleeting moments."

Susan Hauptman's Self-Portrait (with Branch) is an ethereal, almost ghostly work showing the artist in her typically photorealistic detail staring forward in a daze, a silhouette of a bird on the chest of her dress, and a faint branch poking into the frame behind her. It is a fragile, almost intimate moment. The artist is perhaps thinking back to childhood summers spent in uncomplicated play, before heavy, mature emotions like nostalgia factored significantly into her life.

The Maine painter Linden Frederick's Sea Street, which

Brian Rutenberg's abstract landscape Green Goddess 2 radiates with acid greens, electric blues and streaks of mauve that somehow speak to a swampy, verdant feeling of being enmeshed in nature. "He's trying to express that feeling of being in that landscape and being in the heat," said Lorenz, "that feeling of scratching into the mud as a kid and finding stones underneath that have created highlights of colors." Beckoning and immersive, the work hovers someone on the border



📷 Tula Telfair - Worthy of Our Attention, 2022.
Photograph: Tula Telfair; courtesy of Forum
Gallery, New York

between abstraction and representation, tantalizing audiences to look just a little bit longer.

For Lorenz herself, Paul Fenniak's strange painting *Excursion* is particularly evocative. Showing three figures seemingly on a beach with an RV in the background, the work has a dreamlike feeling to it. "Growing up in Australia, and spending day after day going to and from the beach, there's something about the air and the idea of the title gives you a feeling of an excursion. It's a moment where you have escaped for a day, this gorgeously atmospheric moment in time where there's some possibility. There's an unspoken narrative there."

Out of Town offers a welcome moment of pause amid the sweltering days of summer in [New York City](#), while also providing ample space for audiences to project their memories and imaginations into the art here. "None of the paintings in this are didactic," said Lorenz. "Every person who visits will certainly bring their own memories and experiences to them." It will hopefully inspire summer excursions, while providing ample substance for future explorations of nature's potential.

Out of Town is on display at the Forum Gallery in New York until 7 September

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