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RENATO MUCCILLO

The Promised Land

By Michael J. Pearce

It is forever the magic hour of dusk in Renato Muccillo's dreamy display of jewel-like panels at Arcadia Contemporary. He invites us to follow the rich, lazy meanders of his muddy river toward the eternal globe of the setting sun, the sensual golden

god of the ending day who sings the creation into the seductive arms of night and who dreams in soft amber before the silver dawn of lunar light.

Muccillo shapes the magic scenography of this heavenly earth in his studio from

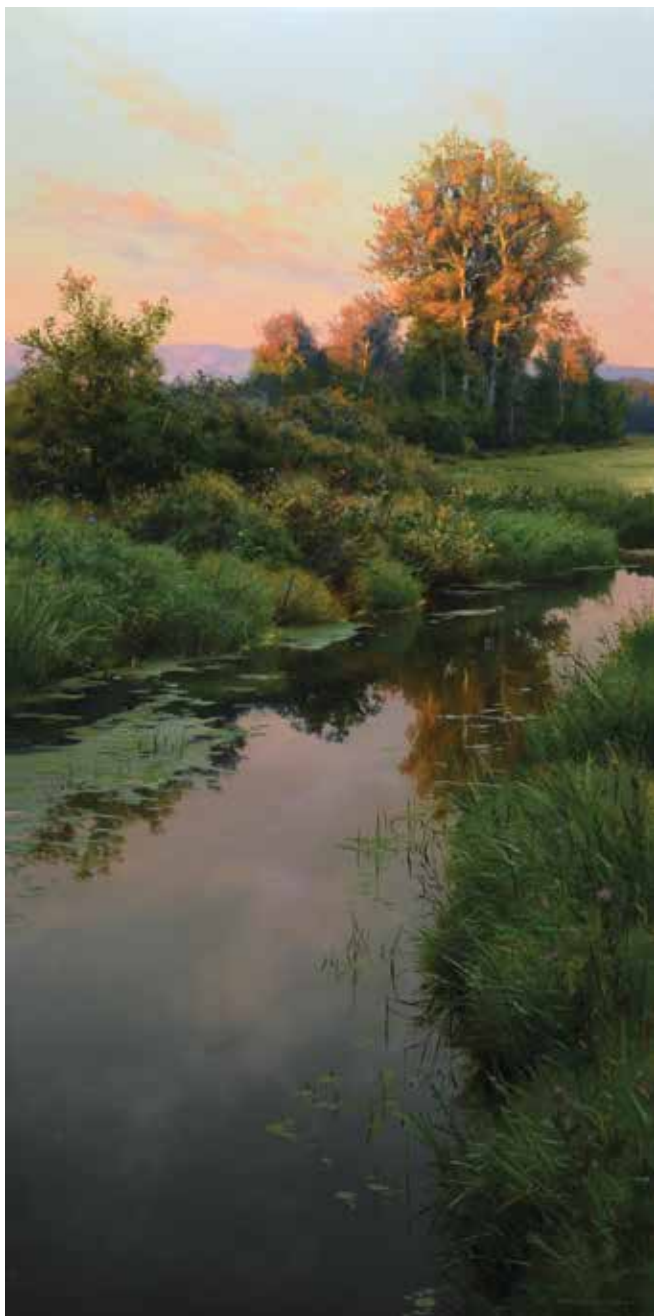
his memories and photographs gathered on exploratory journeys in the wilderness around Vancouver, British Columbia, collecting images of the living land like a botanist seeking selected specimens for his herbal, seeing the setting with the

wisdom born of decades of knowing the needs of his method—shooting photos for his careful memory and sending his drone into the sky to capture digital samples of the spirit of the river’s spread. The drone reveals new visions of the flooded valley. “The Fraser River [in British Columbia] tears the land up and creates puzzle-like formations that are unbelievable,” he says, “The things you see! The drone has been a great tool—it has opened up a lot of possibilities.” His embrace of new technology has allowed him to emulate the work of a long lineage of inspired artists who saw the continental landscape as a sacred place. Beneath his brush the gray mists and purple peaks of the 19th century’s earthly paradise have evolved into magical and golden compositions of an aerial tonalism for the 21st century, like new revelations of Eden.

These paintings are not real places—they are assembled visions of an ideal. “I am not a religious man,” Muccillo reflects, “but to experience being out here at dusk or dawn is a

euphoric, religious experience.” His paintings share his perfected, beautiful landscape as a divine, spiritual space where we can be close to the mystic yet sublime power of nature, especially manifest in the western sun, the benevolent, powerful and all-seeing giver of life and warmth and love.

Here is his *After the Rains*, a wandering song of time and tide, where Muccillo’s magic shapes a sublime space from the slow and silted flow of a serpentine river slipping into sodden fields. The flood has leeched away the levees, eroding them by the subtle power of the eternal current. He holds us hovering over the water, gazing down with weightless sight at the slow unfolding of the muddy meander as if through the aerial eyes of an omniscient observer, and we are granted for a moment the second sight of the divine eye. “This is the holy land for me,” he says. Nature is transformed into a transcendent subject and our contemplation colored by its sensual spirit—we witness the spreading water and know that we are visitors here, custodians of an immortal and perfected land, which is shaped fantastic



1
After the Rains, oil on panel, 9 x 9"

2
North of Trinity at Dusk, oil on panel, 24 x 12"





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and reformed by immense powers whose source is beyond the reach of our finite and fragile minds. Muccillo's paintings are gifts, revealing in brief moments the way the god of nature might wish the world to be.

Thus, Muccillo's visionary land conceals the revelation of idealism. These are not recordings of the real world, but paintings of a promise. "Distillation best represents what I'm trying to put together here," he explains. Muccillo shares a vision of the sacred land as it might be, not as it is. "Extracting the best of all of these moments and putting them into painting. I'm creating 95 percent of these paintings from memory and imagination. I cherry-pick the sweet spots."

The real storms of savage nature are often cruel, but here within his frame she is softened and the destruction she brings subdued. She is composed and made beautiful. Our swollen and natural fear of the primordial flood is calmed by Muccillo's hand, which transforms the rising waters' devastating power, raw and deadly, into a threat tempered by

the promise of preservation.

We American art collectors fill our homes with paintings as moments of concentrated pleasure. Our paintings are us. They are our identity. They signify our willingness to invest our treasure into expressions of thought—and what we choose matters. A painting is a sign to our guests and friends of who we are, symbols of what we believe. We dwell within the vast panoramas of our homeland. We witness and fear the eternal powers that possess the thunderhead skies, and feel the immeasurable presence of the forest's living soul, and stand small before its immensity, and if we long for life in unity with the sublime soul of nature, and if we sense the secret spirit of her sacred heartbeat in the earth, air, sea and sun, then our paintings must reflect our desire. If we look for god's presence on earth, then Renato Muccillo is an answer to the question of why we collect art. ●

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Silent Valley, oil on panel,
24 x 18"

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The Mara, oil on panel,
12 x 36"

5
Bridge View, oil on
canvas, 24 x 24"

6
Crescent Moon, oil on
linen, 10 x 12"