

VISUAL ARTS

Two views of landscapes, vistas and inspiration

BY MICHAEL UPCHURCH
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It's a truism that certain landscapes can become obsessions for some artists.

Think of Monet's haystack fields or waterlily pondscapes, which figure again and again in his work. Closer to home, we have James Lavadour's sagebrush-desert canyons and buttes, repeatedly crowned in smoke and flames.

Two new Seattle gallery shows reveal a pair of local artists working under similar spells. Linda Jo Nazarenus' "So Long Day, So Long Night" draws its sometimes surreal inspiration from her recent travels in the American Southwest and Sweden. Karin Schminke's "Open Space," by contrast, is a headlong immersion in the big skies and flat horizons of her Midwestern childhood, which she pushes into near-abstract territory.

Schminke's and Nazarenus' work couldn't be more different in atmosphere and technique — yet landforms and sky vistas are undeniably what drives their art.

Nazarenus' oils-on-panel have the quirkiest appeal. They often depict wild creatures viewed in extreme close-up against volatile backdrops, using thin oil glazes to build up glowing detail that's a nod to Renaissance-painting dexterity.

In "Hidden," there's genuine mystery afoot, as a magpie and a crow inhabit a high, slanting mountain valley. Lenticular clouds overhead form saucer and coil shapes that press down on the arid landscape. Unseen forces seem to animate both the birds and their surroundings.

In several paintings, Nazarenus is uncanny in the way she evokes animal-awareness in a creature's eye, whether it's a bull moose (in "Respite"), solitary jackrabbits (in "Untouchable" and "Rain Today") or a cagey fox (in "Top of the World").

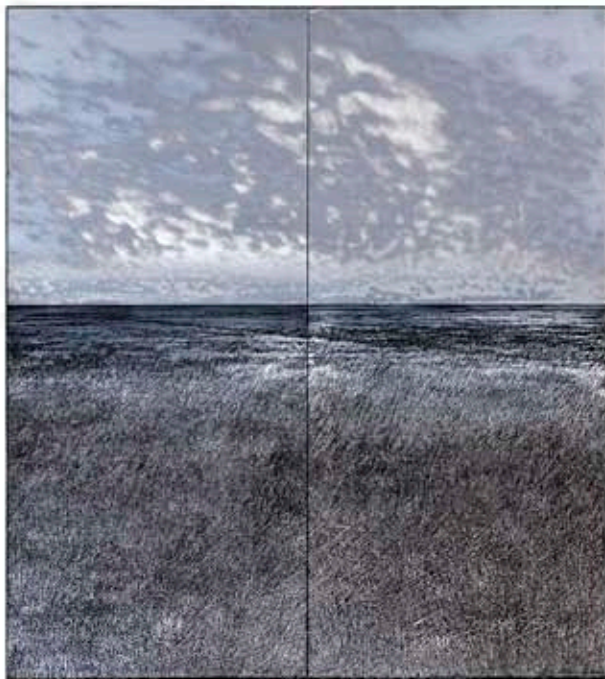
As some titles suggest, Nazarenus is going for something beyond the merely naturalistic. "Always Alone, Never Alone," with its two owls perched on separate bare tree branches, clearly has something to say, in general, about coupledom. Her uninhabited landscapes — "Longing," "Escape," "Cathedral" — also carry a weight in their titles that goes beyond simple geography.

Human elements are rare but unsettling: "Remember When" shows



ART & SOUL

Above: Linda Jo Nazarenus seems to be facing off with a curious moose in "Respite."



KARIN SCHMINKE

Left: Karin Schminke's "Evening Blues" pulls viewers into a wind-scorched grassland with an almost incandescent sky overhead.

an abandoned truck in the foreground and a column of wildfire smoke in the background — a vision of destruction and decay? "Privacy" depicts a long-deserted cemetery with a population of one — private, indeed.

Where Nazarenus revels in tumults of landscape, Schminke is all about featureless, unobstructed views that go on forever. (Agora-

phobes, beware!)

"Although all my art is shaped by growing up on an Iowa farm," the Kenmore-based artist writes, "this series most strongly reflects that influence. While fairly abstract on close inspection, the overall impact is of long vistas that culminate at the horizon."

The works in "Open Spaces" combine traditional painting, photogra-

EXHIBITION REVIEW

'So Long Day, So Long Night'

Works by Linda Jo Nazarenus, 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, through April 3, Lisa Harris Gallery, 1922 Pike Place, Seattle; free (206-443-3315 or www.lisaharrisgallery.com).

'Open Spaces'

Works by Karin Schminke, 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, (open noon-5 p.m. this Saturday) through April 15, Patricia Cameron Gallery, 234 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle; free (206-343-9647 or www.PatriciaCameronGallery.com).

phy, drawing and printmaking techniques with digital technology. Digital laser-etched paper is often embedded with acrylic gels on a "canvas" that's actually subtly lustrous aluminum panel. Other layering effects in other media are used to striking effect.

In "Evening Blues," an expanse of wind-scorched grassland is as finely detailed as a winter field in an Andrew Wyeth painting, while the mottled sky above is almost incandescent behind its cloud cover, thanks to the aluminum backdrop's reflectivity.

"Marble Rock" (one of several works citing Iowa place names) stretches its rust-colored horizon even wider with its "CinemaScope" format. "Tapestry" is totally verdant — an abstraction of thick-leaved boughs above lush meadow. "Strait View" is a seascape, with a sheen on its "water" that changes as you move around it. All three hold tight to Schminke's flat-horizon focus.

One earlier work in the show, "Once in a Blue Moon," makes you aware of the more-severe turn Schminke has taken in these new pictures. In this case, "severe" is good. The limitless prospects she depicts may be bleak — but they're also bracing.

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