

Imaginary Landscapes

By Bridgette M. Redman



L.A. Louver in Venice presents "A Rogue Wave Project," a new photography and sculpture exhibition by Los Angeles-based artist Sean Higgins.

Photo Courtesy of Sean Higgins/L.A. Louver

Photographer and sculptor explores worlds past and present in new L.A. Louver exhibition

Artists have the power to create worlds, which is exactly what Sean Higgins does. Working with photography, collages, ceramics and plexiglass, the artist explores landscapes, dreams and memories.

The Los Angeles-based artist has returned to L.A. Louver where he first exhibited as part of the Rogue Wave group exhibition in 2005. From now until Sept. 2, his photography and sculpture will be on display, inviting patrons to explore with him the worlds of his imagination.

“It’s an incredible space for sure,” Higgins said. “It’s a Venice institution, an LA institution. They’re all amazing folks to work with.”

Higgins, who has moved from Venice to downtown LA, now has a studio in the Arts District and exhibits throughout LA. At the Louver he joins the Rogue Wave program, which is designed to showcase emerging and underrepresented talent in LA. There have been five group showings—of which Higgins was in the second one. There have also been several solo projects, the most recent being Yvette Gellis in 2021.

All the works on display were created this past year: six photographic works and a handful of ceramics. The photographs are part of a series that has been ongoing for years.

“These sort of landscapes are composite experiences,” Higgins said. “They look very realistic on the surface, but then as you look deeper into them, they kind of come apart. You realize that they’re not what they seem. They have different layers in them. You get to see the landscape from different angles.”

The ceramics complement the photography as they are also landscape-based. They are objects that function as household objects such as vases or platters that are formed from the landscape. He says the two types of works are set up in a way that ties them together at the LA Louver.

“The sculpture and photographic works kind of talk to each other in this funny way,” Higgins said. “The sculptures look like mountains and they sit in front of the photographs in an interesting way. The sculptures could live inside the photographs.”

Higgins was raised in Pennsylvania and graduated with an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1998. That year he had four exhibitions—two in New York, one in Philadelphia and another in Camden, New Jersey. It was the start of an art career which has always come back to landscapes. He says he has followed in the tradition of American landscape painters starting from the Hudson school, even though his landscapes are often fantastical and born of his imagination.

“The history of my work has always been interested in landscape,” Higgins said. “I’m trying to do an ancient genre but thinking about it in modern terms.”

Through the years, Higgins said he’s been fascinated by the way people approach his photography and the questions that they ask. Often, they are asking him where a particular scene is from.

“I always find that kind of interesting,” Higgins said. “Each one of those works is of a specific place, but it’s not a real place. The landscape you see in those works is not a real place. That’s always an interesting conversation for me because it doesn’t exist as a place, but everyone always asks where it is.”

This particular landscape series he started in either 2014 or 2015 and he jokingly refers to it as his endless series, one in which the landscapes stack up upon each other and feel like endless rolling hills that go on forever. It’s part of what he is trying to convey and he plans to be making more landscapes in this series for years to come.

The photos are collages of digital photographs that Higgins puts together. He prints them using an inkjet printer on 100% rag paper. Some of his works are available as NFTs. The ceramics in the LA Louver exhibit are something fairly new for him.

“The ceramics came out of nowhere,” Higgins said. “I’m not normally a sculptor. I’m not normally a ceramicist, but this idea came to me, and I decided to pursue making some 3D objects.”

Some of it was born out of his interest in geology and public domain sets of data. He was exploring 3D data sets that were available through the United States Geological Survey and took some of those data to model into his own purposes and create vessels based on them. The ceramics include such things as Crater Lake, the volcanos of the Cascade Mountain range and geological oddities of the west. He has created them with food-safe glaze so they can be functional as well as artistic.

Some of the idea was born in looking at how people have responded to various geological disasters and created art from them.

“After Mount St. Helens erupted there were all these objects people made to commemorate the disaster and I thought that was a really interesting idea,” Higgins said. “If you go on eBay, you can find a Mount St. Helens ashtray from the eruption or there’s a great salt and pepper shaker set that was modelled into the shape of the volcano.”

Higgins found it a fascinating way to take something scary and remember it in a unique and artistic manner. He’s enjoyed talking about the process of making the ceramics since it is such a new process for him. It starts with a 3D model on the computer. He then prints it using a 3D printer and casts it. At that point, he uses traditional firing processes.

“Ceramics is a very old tradition, but these are made from 3D modeling,” Higgins said. “That conversation is interesting to me—an ancient form made into a modern one in a strange way.”

Like his landscapes, Higgins plans to continue making the ceramic objects and to expand his exploration of what he can create with them.

WHAT: Sean Higgins Exhibition at L.A. Louver

WHERE: 45 North Venice Boulevard, Venice

WHEN: Through Sept. 2

INFO: lalouver.com

https://www.argonautnews.com/arts_and_events/imaginary-landscapes/article_36e61c9e-1e75-11ed-9679-d710b8b8c518.html