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michael raedecker

I have never been to Michael Raedecker's studio, but I can imagine what brightens the walls besides his intricate, serious paintings. Photographs of Modernist architecture in inhospitable places, for example, the 1940s houses of Albert Frey in the parched wilderness of Palm Springs. Reproductions of flat Dutch landscapes in sharply recessive perspective by seventeenth-century painters such as Jacob van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema. NASA photographs, embroidery patterns, and pages from antiquated home decor catalogues. If these influences aren't on his paint-splattered walls, they are all over his paintings, and his ability to synthesize them into atmospheric images of disturbingly archetypal locales has made Raedecker one of the most successful of London's painters.

His ascent has been swift. Born in 1963, he worked as a fashion designer (collaborating with Martin Margiela on three collections) before studying painting at Amsterdam's Rijksakademie and London's Goldsmiths' College. In 1999, just one year after graduating, he won the UK's prestigious John Moores Prize for painting, and in 2000 he was nominated for the Turner Prize. He found his signature style early: Impastoed, washed, and poured paint in subdued colors, plus embroidered addenda, the legacy of his career as a couturier. More often than not, he alchemizes this mixture into an architectural landscape: a single building, usually a low-slung Modernist bungalow with a large single picture window, dropped into a raw vista dotted with lunar plants and rocks. The viewer's vantage point is often from out of the house's window onto this exterior landscape. The room itself feels long abandoned. In a painting from 1999, the viewer is positioned in a grey living room enlivened only by a cream-colored, tufted rug (reproduced as tufted wool stitched into the canvas). One gazes out, perhaps longingly, at a distant mountain range. *Reformation* (2002), a new canvas from Raedecker's recent show at The approach in London, shows a similar interior that has started to decay. The picture window is still there, but the walls are a darker shade of grey. Initially, it seems that the pieces of cheap, woodfinish veneer that Raedecker has sewn onto the canvas with cobwebby loops of thread are patching the walls of the room, but they don't follow its architectural contours—they are actually parching the painting, trying to hold together its illusory space while fatally torpedoing it.

This is crucial, for Raedecker is simultaneously a creator of



Michael Raedecker *placebo*, 2002, acrylic, oil, and thread on canvas, 65 x 96 cm. On view at The approach, London

mirages and a destroyer of illusions. A large work, *Someone Said that the World's a Stage* (2002), surveys a painted topography of coral-pink sea and pallid real shore, dotted with stitched replications of bamboo huts, palm trees, rocks, and oddities such as a small, dragon-like figure and an exploding checkerboard-patterned cube. These last are somewhat redundant signs of trouble in a paradise that is neither realistic in its facture—the embroidered aspeers, though they are more physically present than the painted ones, jar the eye with their conscious artifice—or its composition. Floating in the upper left of the picture, intricate grids of iridescent thread create several overlapping polygons that look like windows in receding perspective, as if the trademarks of Raedecker's phantasmal houses had disengaged themselves and

were floating free. It is nothing new for artists to break their iconography into its constituent parts to test the vitality of each, but in Raedecker's schema of puncturing illusion this dismemberment has a consistent purpose. His paintings have long suggested that there is no perfect paradise to run to, either inside or outside the mind—for these are psychological landscapes, allegories of mental escape from what Sartre termed the hell that is other people. But here even the architecture of the illusion is beginning to collapse, and Raedecker's newly roseate lighting only makes matters worse. In his paintings one always feels stuck—either stuck inside a darkened house, or stuck outside it looking at its bright lights, or stuck hovering over a landscape—and then the painting itself starts to disintegrate before your eyes.

The only person who isn't stuck is Raedecker himself. While he also makes portraits (although not to great effect), one of the most interesting paintings in The Approach's show is a small still life.

This work, *placebo* (2002) is set in a reflective, silvery space around which ricochet shimmering afterimages of embroidered versions of another checkered cube, a glass tumbler, an upright, lit cigarette, and a baroque glass paperweight.

This tense, deceptive, self-enclosed world of non-Euclidean possibility suggests Raedecker might also have some *Pittura Metaphysica* reproductions on his studio wall. And while he will undoubtedly continue to map unnatural, melancholy landscapes, I hope he visits this place again,

Martin Herbert

This profile was published on the occasion of the Michael Raedecker exhibition at The Approach, London.



Michael Raedecker *echo*, 2002, acrylic and thread on linen, 254 x 198 cm.