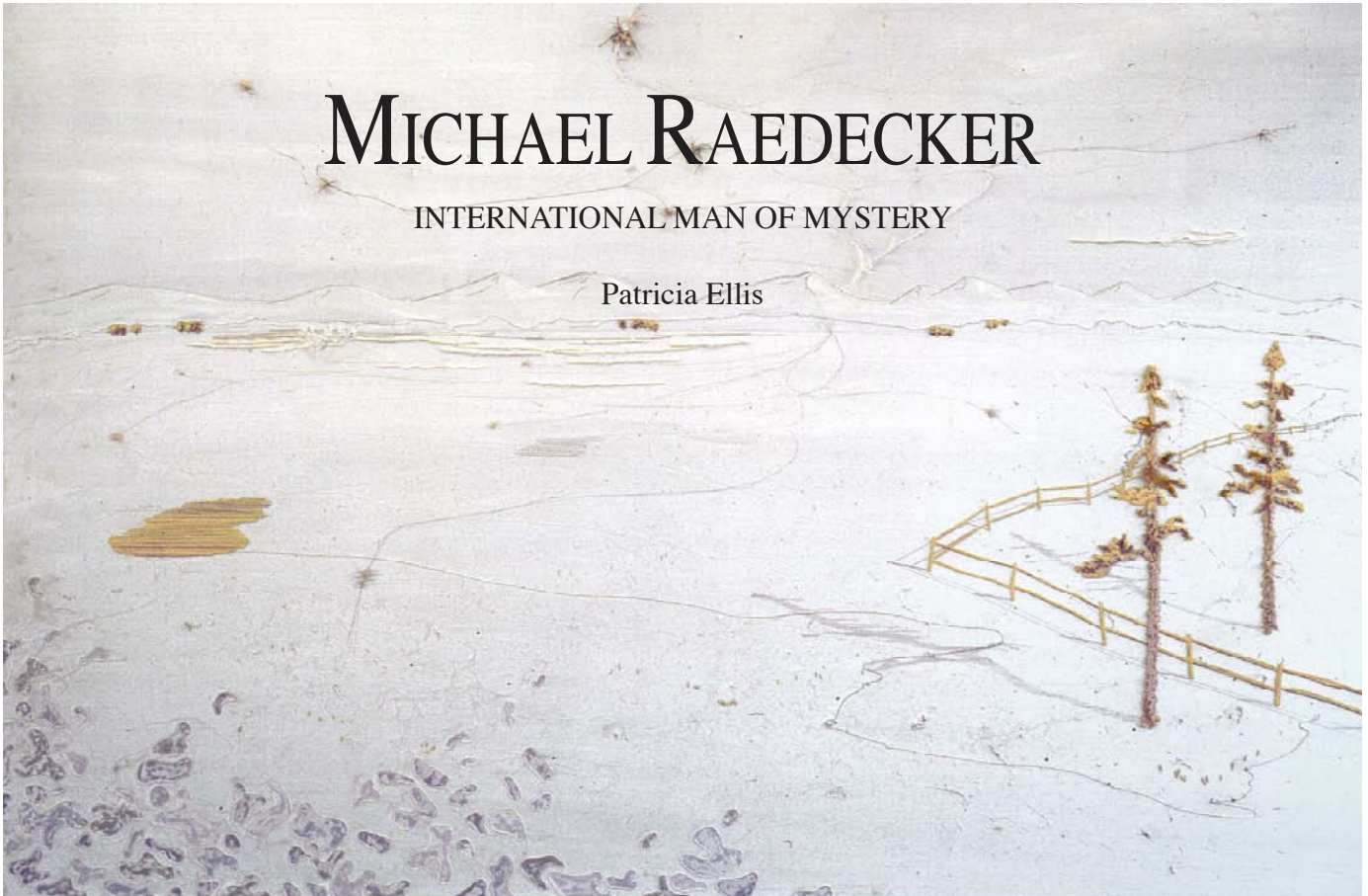


Flash Art

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY

Patricia Ellis



Drift, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 166 x 244 cm

MR: Painting is a serious matter.

PE: So you're a really serious guy.

MR: It's funny to realise that myself.

Spinning on the head of a needle, Michael Raedecker weaves a spell of ambience. In the pink-grey dawn of a crispy winter morning, a modern American dream house is frozen in solitude. The luxury of isolation, the status symbol coldness of desirable acquired loneliness. Clinical and undisturbed — disturbing. Anticipation is creeping, the hairs of your neck tingle. Like a distant memory or prophecy, you don't see this painting, you sense it — like tension in the air, an unsettling emotion. It's a comfortable nervous feeling, impending. Like silent sleeping breaths buried in snow.

Raedecker is a master of ambience, of déjà-vu, of Something Not Quite Right. His signature mute-toned paintings dazzle with recognisable, associative glamour, made intimate with homey hand-stitched detailing; Grannycraft warmth with a hard corporate edge. His interiors and landscapes are instantly familiar: anonymous empty

hotel rooms, vast spreads of vacant unscathed vista. It's like he's painting a road trip, constantly on the move: fugitive, twitching, unsettled.

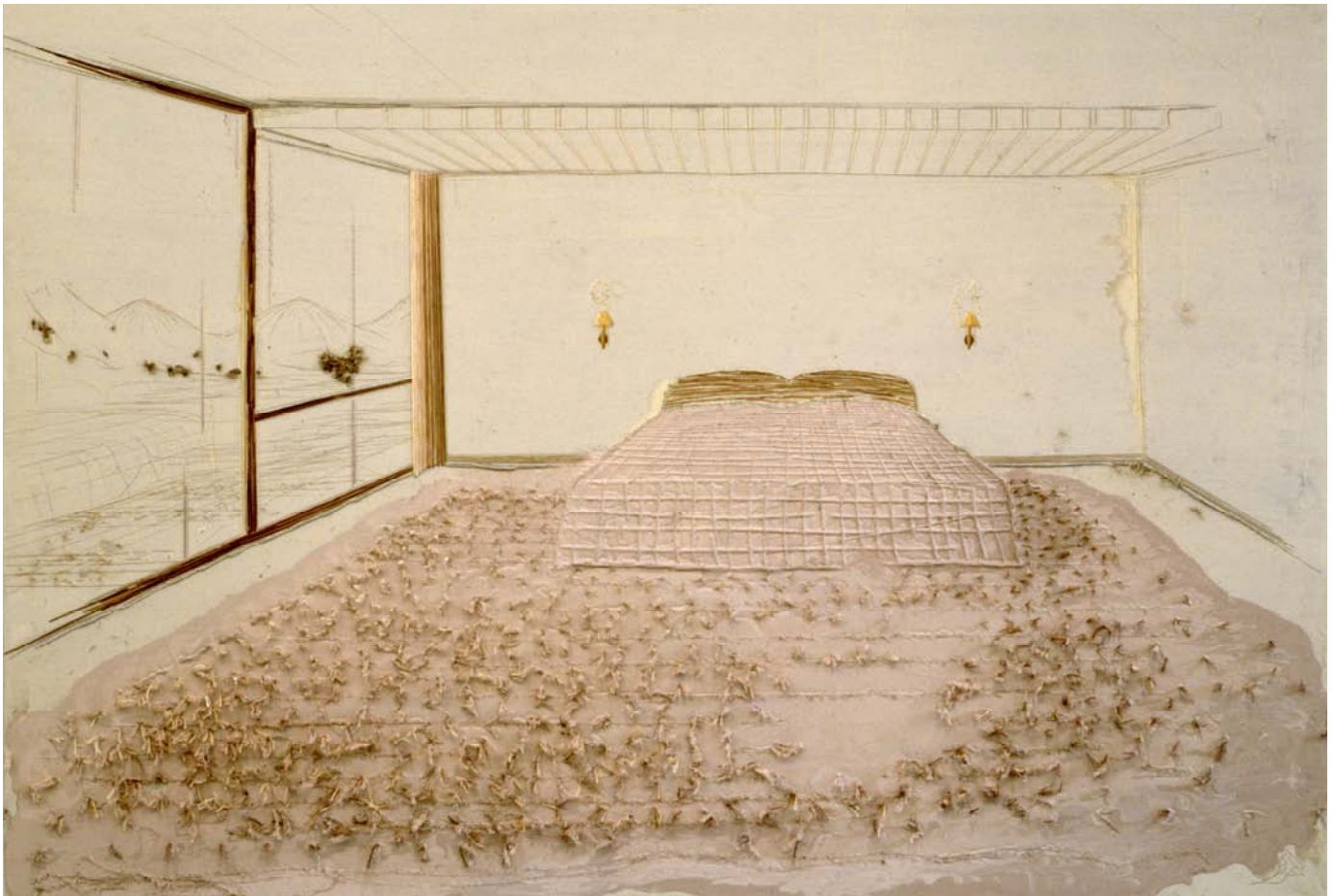
"I'm not sure why I do landscapes — maybe because they make us seem so small, or maybe because as a city person I just see them on TV or film. We've always had our thing towards nature and by living in a big city I can neutralise it or block it out; it simply doesn't exist. So the paintings are probably not even landscapes."

Acutely honed and perfectly set, Raedecker compresses his trigger devices. Filmic without narrative, movement, or sound, his lingering suspension is cinematic minimalism. His subject matter is more common on the big screen than in the big city. Romanticised banality, taken for granted not from experience, but from desensitised media.

Pastoral and seductive, Raedecker's images are sleepy post-card perfect, undermined by an irrational suspicion of silent small-town trauma. You find yourself wading in the foreign-ness of fa-

miliarity. It's the gnawing knowingness of *Twin Peaks* or *Fargo*, but without the quirks or camp. The premise of nervousness is served up straight-laced; it's a numbing construction.

"It seems maybe obsolete to do landscape. But I hope that with the 'landscapes' I do there is this sense of timelessness. The great outdoors has always been there, long before us, and nothing has changed ever since. And we have always been puzzled how to relate towards this 'thing' that's as mysterious as life itself. Therefore for me it's still relevant to do painting. Although people are walking away from it because on a theoretical level it seems to be going in circles. It might not be compatible with the times we live in; it can't keep up with TV or the media. But since the media is omnipresent we need a barrier against 'reality,' and that's probably why there is a new wave of interest in painting. The 2D aspect is easy to get into, you know it's not real. In the end painting is just an optical illusion. So if painting is not real let's move away from reality and do big budget film stuff in a low budget



Guarantee, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 152 x 203 cm

individual medium. Like a landscape that mysteriously continues upsidedown.”

Hollow Hill: The dank enrapture of a cave, a swooping helicopter shot of a lake, Raedecker edges closer still to the surreal. Swirling and distorted, the landscape becomes frozen in a .rush of confusion. Serenely void, but forensic with detail, the colours loom, damp and mossy. For some unknown reason, the shadows fall the wrong way. A deafeningly pacifying dream that pulls you in. Desiring.

Hinging on emptiness, Raedecker’s ambience is a suggestion of absence. Seduced by perfectly static compositions, your imagination succumbs to a pretence of inertia. The cool calmness of the extremely refined colours, the delicate regularity of labour intensive stitching: The effect is hypnotising. Entropic ghosts of places, without character, context, acoustics, or gravity. Landscapes are constructed like interiors. They’re all about design. It’s your own reaction to Raedecker’s selected isolation which creates the emotional friction. Raedecker has planned and constructed these experiences just for you.

A bright and pricy suite of a remote luxury inn. Generic, swept clean of any history, void of any

sign of life, every trace evaporated. Sealed in it’s four-star splendour, recycled air flows osmotic through the double weave sheets, the thick woolly carpet, efficiently confined by the double-glazed plate glass. It smells positively... earthy.

“When I start a new painting the first thing I do is to find out how to make it, like a director has to know how to visualise a scenario. then when I’m working, I try to act; I try to be as innocent and intuitive as I was when I did my

first painting. Raw and unpolished, it was the atmosphere that was important to come off through the pores of the canvas. And still every time I’m working on one, I am surprised how it comes out. I’m trying to learn something worthwhile in the process and make something that is unintelligible and enigmatic, and therefore says something about... Life... whatever.”

Patricia Ellis is an artist and writer based in London and Milan.



Left to right: Hollow Hill, 1999, Acrylic and thread on linen, 152 x 203 cm.; Hindsight, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 198 x 167.5 cm. All Images: Courtesy The Approach, London.