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Simon Glass

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TORONTO



Simon Glass: Sunset, near Mezuqeh Drugot (2008): Image: giclee prints, 30 x 38 inches. Courtesy the artist and Gallery 44, Toronto.

By Sky Goodden

Across a sweep of hardwood flooring, and shored up on its gallery's cool white walls, nine photographs and one airplane wing conjure the desert.

Jeremiah 4:23-27, a recent exhibition of Simon Glass's giclée prints, stand torn and quiet as they attempt to fix light, assign metaphor and trace a seeking that bears no mark.

Simon Glass

Gallery 44

January 7 – February 12, 2011



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Simon Glass: Thistles, near Hebron (2008).

An unsettling provocation greets the viewer upon entering the gallery: "As with history and memory, speculation is as compatible with belief as it is with doubt." This rattle of agitating dichotomies lays the groundwork (tectonic plates sliding) for a series of ruminative and sun-bleached prints. Shot in Israel and Palestine's West Bank, Glass depicts a passage from Jerusalem to Egypt that Jeremiah is believed to have traversed. The prophet's most heated verse, 4:23-27, accompanies these prints and their winged installation in an Annotated Translation that embosses Jeremiah's anger and despair, and speculates on the foundation of their very phrasing. "I saw the land and it was unformed and void; and to the skies and they had no light," begins Jeremiah. Glass's annotation then takes apart the land, the void and its skies in a series of etymological deconstructions. Among these, he alights on two words – *tohu vebohu* – that only appear together twice in all of Hebrew scripture: once in Genesis, "describing a state of creation," and finally in Jeremiah, "describing a state of destruction." The prophet's reversal shudders its doubt and despondency through Glass's frames, which capture the craggy desert dunes in the light before sundown, and the light that follows. A ragged tear creases these prints, aligning light and its imminent dissolve, and producing a visual metaphor for the snuffing out of faith's resolve.

The portentous and the prophetic are given form in Glass's photographs, which trail the sand and search the sky. But, as with any prophetic gesture, of which Jeremiah enacted many, the record of their meaning is not necessarily consistent with their intent, and Glass's speculation falls to quiet deliberation, meditation and proxy. A burned-out car hangs perilously on a desiccated dune, its front door swung open in a final gesture of retreat. In another, Jeremiah's verse, "I saw and there was not a man and all the birds of the sky fled," is met with an image of scattered feathers (in perhaps the most didactic of these remnant metaphors), their black trail deflected in the sand. But, the most intriguing and effective of these haunted images are the ones that – superficially, at least – picture nothing at all. The desert and its brush fill their frames with an uncomfortable gesture to the infinite. And without so much as a narrative gesture, we are free to imagine the vastness and the quietude of this contested land, and the palimpsest of seeking figures that have traversed its traceless drifts. "And the land shall be desolate but I shall not make an end," offers Jeremiah, finally. Glass's pursuit is similarly heedless – but as with history and memory, his speculation is absolute.

Sky Goodden is a Toronto-based art writer, editor and curator. She is the co-editor of the contemporary culture publication, *ONE HOUR EMPIRE*, and recently completed the 2010 Editorial Residency at *Canadian Art*. She continues to write for *Canadian Art*, as well as *C Magazine*, *Prefix*, *Sketch* and *Muse*. She was co-curator of *The Matter of Loss*, a collaborative exhibition involving OCADU and the Art Gallery of Ontario that was held at the AGO in 2009, and is curating a forthcoming exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. She received a Master of Fine Arts in Criticism & Curatorial Practice from the Ontario College of Art & Design University in 2010.



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