



JOY GARNETT

Ends of the Earth

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Slag Gallery, 56 Bogart Street, Brooklyn, NY 11206

JOY GARNETT *Ends of the Earth*

Deborah Frizzell

We forget that there is a thrill that attends the slower pleasures, pleasures that become increasingly powerful the more time we spend pursuing them.

– Mark Strand¹

The walls of Joy Garnett's studio are lined with rows of small paintings punctuated by larger, turbulent landscapes. Brushstrokes of intense hues are calmed by a fugitive light reflected on water. Shifting atmospheric effects of weather and twilight, held within the seam of day and night, manifest an explicitly romantic turn toward American Luminism. A primeval calm is disturbed by brash, and at times, garish colors: cadmium orange and

¹ Mark Strand interviewed in *The Paris Review*,
<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1070/the-art-of-poetry-no-77-mark-strand>

yellow against cobalt violet, naphthol red on viridian green and cobalt blue. Garnett's new landscape paintings are oriented between hallucinatory imaginings and a heightened sensibility to our observations of nature. Situated within the drama of the natural world with its organic historicity, the artist plunges us into layered, associative and resonant horizons in a movement toward the *Ends of the Earth*.

In her father's biochemistry laboratory, Garnett learned to observe and translate visual information by documenting experiments; she became familiar with instruments of image manipulation that made the invisible suddenly manifest in an illusion of direct proximity. As a painter, she has explored how we process abstract technological information while adapting subtle, new perceptual habits to naturalize these mediations in our everyday life. Culling images from the Internet and elsewhere, including surveillance footage, infrared and night vision imagery, the artist mines the techno-media landscape as source material and as a point of departure. Contemporary painters as varied in approach as Gerhard Richter, Marlene Dumas, Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans deploy photographic images and similar source material to manipulate and highlight the artificiality, dematerialization and virtualization within media feedback loops. The infra-thin image-world and hyper-accelerated media saturate our visual experience, triggering a chronic

hunger for stimulation, framed, flattened, packaged and severed from the body and its experience of space/time. As philosopher Hagi Kenaan has observed, 'The rule of the screen is indeed increasingly becoming entrenched as the basic structure of the appearance of meaning, and one of the prominent expressions of this entrenchment is the process of its becoming transparent.'²

Through the process of painting, Garnett subverts the feedback loop by revealing the in-between states of matter becoming form in the palpability of viscous oil paint, a process that gives a pulse to color and shape by conveying and implying movement amidst inevitable change. In her previous painting series, the artist harnessed 'the aggressive ambiguity of paint' to blur the boundary between figuration and abstraction, revealing the coming-into-being of once hidden phenomena. Painting rapidly in a single sitting, Garnett disrupts the 'disinterestedness' and flatness of her source imagery by infiltrating the usual media-inflected filters. Her source material is superseded and pierced by tactility, improvisation and the body's kinesthetic awareness. The artist writes, '[T]he

² Hagi Kenaan, *Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and the Contemporary Gaze* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co., Ltd, 2013), xix.

primacy of the flesh and of the human continues to insert itself, slowing things down for both painter and viewer, revealing meanings and sensations gradually; painting secretes itself slowly, over time.³ The very act of painting opens up a space in which the world and the physicality of being-in-the-world are illuminated by an inexhaustible totality. Our corporeality, experience of gravity, stillness and motion within duration, and our dynamic involvement within spatial orientation cause sensations felt only by our motile body being in and of the 'stuff' of the world. As philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, within art we are given more than a moment of vision; we are allowed to dwell along with the painting in a unique way that takes us out of ordinary time into fulfilled or autonomous time.⁴

With its luminous ruby-red glow and its high horizon line traced in violet-white, Garnett's large-scale painting, *Sea of Love*, grabs our attention not only with its palpable heat but also because of its mysterious, otherworldly quality. The scene is eerily moonlit, or

³ Joy Garnett in "Toward a New Ecology of Time," *Virilio and Visual Culture*, edited by John Armitage and Ryan Bishop (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 42.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

perhaps that tiny bright sphere with its radiating corona is a searchlight floating in the distance. The sense of foreboding is heightened by the glow of alizarin crater flows, seeping outward in a trajectory suggestive of a meltdown at the Earth's core. Boulders ring the crater's edge while glints of titanium mark their surfaces and purple shadows skirt their undersides. Swirls of white flick upward, snake-like, disappearing into inky darkness. Is this an unidentified continent, a fiery sea or another realm altogether? Does the deep violet signal a lethal radioactivity? Or is *Sea of Love* a dreamscape, evoking the title's hint of an R&B song or a *film noir* thriller?

The impact of Garnett's *Twin Peaks* is similarly double-edged, with thick brushwork erupting in tonal contrasts reminiscent of George Bellows' Maine landscapes. We are confronted head-on with a view of writhing mountain peaks, our position that of a viewer dangling precariously in midair. The sky beyond is emerald green with sooty shadows, calm in contrast to the peaks' squiggles of blue, orange, pink and white. The churning and rupturing of the earth's crust lends an anthropological thrust to the scene. *Twin Peaks*: is this a sly reference to David Lynch's popular serial drama and murder most foul? Similarly supernatural, or at least, unnatural rumblings mingle with dark humor in

the small painting *Lemon Ghost*, where a glacier fluoresces into yellow flames; they lick the night sky and are reflected in ominous red undercurrents below the waves.

Another small painting, *Green Glo*, exudes an eerie malachite radiance interrupted by swampy outcroppings. Illuminating the biological thermal energies within, *Green Glo* suggests the possibility of hidden nocturnal life forms. The smoky vortexes and skies of Frederic Edwin Church's South American landscapes also come to mind, with their allusions to transformative energies. Techno-mediated imagery and references to earlier landscape painters converge again in *Turquoise Convoy*, where two pale ships are defined by swathes of orange-red waves and a sienna sky. The brushstrokes evoke Charles Burchfield's gestural curlicues, lending an expressionist edge to the military silhouettes and surging sea. In *Red Sea*, a ruby ocean clashes with slashes of thalo blue ships, painted *alla prima*. Although the sea is calm, the choppy strokes indicate something unseen. Hot and cold, seductive and eerie, the painting invokes the biblical parting of another red sea that stretches between Africa and Asia. *Red Sea*, like others in the series, haunts us as we imagine scenarios both sublime and improbable, the dramas taking place at the ends of the earth.