

OUTSIDE INFLUENCE

Artist **William Glen Crooks** gives fresh looks at familiar subjects: landscapes

By Neil Kendrick

Landscape paintings are hardly in vogue within today's avant-garde art circles. But observant artists like William Glen Crooks are still studying landscapes in search of revealing images cloaked inside such familiar subject matter.

Scott White Contemporary Art's current exhibition, "William Glen Crooks: Recent Paintings," pivots around the artist's perceptions of landscapes as quasi-theatrical tableaux; fragments of the natural world defined by the changing quality of light over time.

Oftentimes, the locations depicted in Crooks' representational paintings feel like images captured from the vantage point of a moving car. They could be inspired by snapshots from road trips, or a familiar view found on a path that is usually taken for granted.

Although the artist puts a great deal of attention toward getting the photo-realistic details just right, his efforts aren't designed to evoke an aura of the sublime like earlier landscape painters. Crooks' paintings are more about moments when the fading light bounces off ordinary objects, like the plastic chair in "Seat" and the bridge in "On Las Pilitas Road" with their beatific glow.

Completed mostly this year, this small suite of paintings is partly inspired by photographs and slides the artist has taken of specific locations. Crooks' pieces also are linked by their use of dusk-time lighting that photographers and cinematographers alike call the "magic hour," when the setting sun bathes the landscape in a fleeting, golden luminosity.

Looking at Crooks' paintings



Light is one of the painterly effects that draw the viewer into the picture. In "On Las Pilitas Road," the bridge, rendered in almost photographic style, glows. *Aki Martin*

from a distance only heightens their photo-realistic, illusionistic sense of space. The artist's 10 paintings are mostly devoid of any human presence despite the recurrent motif of roads and other signs of human activity found in "Hot Coffee" and 2005's "Starlight."

However, Crooks disrupts the tranquil surfaces of select paintings by introducing the suggestion of people in transit; bodies trespassing across his solitary landscapes.

A car's bright headlights, for example, are glimpsed from a distance in "Blue Approach" and a boat is dwarfed by the lush, green foliage of rolling hills in "The Motorboat."

Crooks ventures outside his comfort zone of rural settings far from frenzied cityscapes by depicting a more urban environment in his painting "A Curve in the Boulevard." Where the artist's other recent works depict vast stretches of land under open skies, this piece evokes an almost claustrophobic vibe with its deliberately cluttered composition of buildings and ubiquitous billboards lining near empty city streets.

Born and raised in San Diego, Crooks is an artist whose photo-realistic works express a fascination with the relationship between the land and sky meeting in silence. Here,

the everyday phenomena of day sliding into night, then back again, takes center stage on the meditative calm found in his oil paintings on canvas. After all, beauty in nature is wherever you look for it, and Crooks appears most at home when his mind's eye is free to indulge in the wanderlust of the open road.

DATEBOOK

"William Glen Crooks: Recent Paintings"

Through Aug. 31

Scott White Contemporary Art, 2400 Kettner Blvd., Loft #238, downtown; Free; (619) 501-5689

"Summer Stock VIII," a group exhibition

Noon to 5 p.m. Thursday to Saturday; Through Aug. 19

David Zapf Gallery, 2400-104 Kettner Blvd., downtown; Free; (619) 232-5004