

KEN WORLEY: ROCKWOODS RESERVATION
February 10 - March 4, 2006

Silence in nature is something we can only daydream about. Take a drive out of the city's limits and all you ever see now is a new housing area being developed. One has to drive further and further to reach any kind of tranquility and the self-indulgent pleasure of just being able to experience nature on a more intimate level. Walking into a gallery surrounded by Ken Worley's paintings offers the viewer the chance to transport to a place where nature can be soothing, quiet and ominous all at the same time.

Ken grew up in St Louis, but relocated to San Francisco to get his MFA and then eventually returned to his hometown. His search for subject matter brought him to the Rock Wood Reservation State Park in St Louis County. The magnetism of this location has occupied his interest for over 20 years. What fascinates me is that this exploration is not unlike Cézannes paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire. I like the fact that Worley has been able to find new things within the same subject over all of these years. Most artists, at this time, lack a certain level of patience with their subject matter. It is easy to keep moving on to bigger and better ideas. Worley has found his own personal world that continues to hold his attention and expand the vocabulary within his work. Formalism is the driving force, but the draw of this place and his role in bringing this treasure to our attention are the things that stand out about him.

He is careful to go out and make small color sketches in the park and then religiously returns to the same spot, at the same time, so he can make sure he has the lighting correct. Unlike other artists that try to record the factual setting in front of them, Ken actually ends up recording a certain quality about that particular place that interests him. The sketches constantly change over a few sittings and then he returns to the studio to create the larger works. Process is very important in Worley's work. He uses oil pastels to make his sketches and then mills his own oil sticks in the studio for his paintings. Through a process of layering and scratching into the surface, he arrives at his final image. In many ways, this tactile approach to his work is so essential to the reading of his work.

In conversations with Ken over the years, I have come to know him as someone that really cares about St Louis and has been a longtime supporter of the Arts. His involvement in organizations like Art St Louis, has established him as a leader in supporting emerging artists. His paintings of Rockwoods Reservation stand as memorials to a timeless appreciation of nature.

Written by Chris Kahler

Chris Kahler is an artist. His work was recently on view in an exhibition at Gescheidle Gallery, Chicago, Illinois. He is scheduled to exhibit new work with the Bruno David Gallery during the 2006-2007 season.

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists.