

NICHOLAS METIVIER GALLERY

MATT BAHEN: *WAS ONCE ONLY IMAGINED*

PRESS RELEASE

March 2nd – March 28th

Nicholas Metivier Gallery is delighted to announce *Was Once Only Imagined*, an exhibition of new paintings by Matt Bahen. The exhibition will open on March 2nd and run until March 28th. This is Bahen's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery. There will be a talk with Sara Angel, Founder, Executive Director and Publisher of the Art Canada Institute, and the artist on Saturday, March 2nd at 1PM. The McIntosh Gallery at Western University will mount an exhibition of new paintings by Matt Bahen, *Coming Down the Mountain*, which will be on view April 1st to June 1st, 2024.

Was Once Only Imagined takes its exhibition title from the English poet and printmaker William Blake's visionary book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, - "What is now proved was once only imagined."

A voracious reader, literary sources are the foundation of Bahen's practice. He consumes everything from landmarks of classical literature and poetry to staples of popular culture. The paintings in *Was Once Only Imagined* take inspiration from a variety of genres, including the writings of playwright Anton Chekhov, the world of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and Bahen's recurrent inspiration Cormac McCarthy.

I strive to interpret the power of metaphor and allegory in the landscapes I paint. While the work may evoke a particular place, they're composites of locations I imagine while reading books, or sections taken from my own and other source material. I want to allow the viewer room to enter the paintings with their own interpretations. - Matt Bahen

Matt Bahen's choice of oil paint as his medium, as well as his application of it, have come to define his practice. Bahen wields his brush in a way that emphasizes the materiality of his surfaces. He is a "painter's painter", akin to Kiefer and Freud, layering the surfaces of his canvases with intentional, thickly impastoed brushstrokes.

Bahen's work arrests the viewer from a distance, drawing us in closer until we are enveloped in the textural richness of his forest scenes. We hear the water rushing, the fire crackling, and the wind blowing through the trees. Our eye darts from one element to another, constantly in motion. Like the narrative principle of Chekhov's gun, which states that every component of a story must be necessary or otherwise eliminated from the plot, every element of Bahen's landscapes is chosen to draw us into his world.

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Within the thick forests of Bahen's paintings are a parade of entangled metaphors and signifiers. Waterfalls are a key feature of many of the works in the exhibition. According to Bahen, the waterfall is the opposite of passive contemplation. He experienced this firsthand during a recent trip to New Zealand's Waikato River.

We visited an enormous eleven-meter waterfall, called Huka Falls. When we parked the car we could hear the incredible roar of the falls right away, well before we were within eyeshot. When a force is that powerful you can feel it before you see it. - Matt Bahen