

ARCADIA ALL OVER

by N.F. Karlins



James Bidgood
Pan
late 1960s
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York



Arthur Tress
Adam in the Park
1982
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York

Photography offers escape, sexual and sublime, in two summer shows, "Arcadia" at ClampArt and "Desert Light" at Throckmorton Fine Art, allowing for one's preferred mode of transcendence and taste.

At Chelsea's ClampArt, "Arcadia" offers a mix of contemporary color and black-and-white work plus a couple of paintings. The most flamboyant and colorful image in the show is *Pan* (from the late 1960s), a god whose mythic home was Arcadia. This *Pan* is by James Bidgood, a gay photographer who influenced David La Chappelle and Pierre et Gilles but who isn't nearly as well known.

Bidgood presents the god at his pipes with alluring soft flesh surrounded by Technicolor props and a minimum of strategically placed clothing. Amid all the splendor and artificiality, the body of Pan is real, not air-brushed into perfection. The balance makes the image all the stronger.

As if this find weren't enough, Arthur Tress, whose life's work was the subject of a recent retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., contributes another imaginative erotic male image in *Groom with Arabian* (1996) in black-and-white. Here a full-length male nude is shown facing away from the viewer, holding the reins of a white horse in a forest setting. Man and beast, both bare and white, are subsumed in a misty atmosphere, framed by a repoussoir of foliage.

Less overtly sexual but equally interesting is Tress's *Adam in the Park* from 1982. A slender boy, nude to the waist, stretches out his youthful arms for balance as he totters near a pond's edge. It expresses in a lyrical way the wonder and daring of adolescence.



Marc Yankus
Clouds from My Father's Roof
2002
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York



Lori Nix
Paradise
2004
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York



Stephen Wilkes
Alaska Glacier with Climber
2008
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York



Karen Gunderson
Arcadia
2009
"Arcadia"
ClampArt, New York

Not all work in "Arcadia" is focused on the male body. Mother Nature herself is scrutinized in all her moods. Stan Gaz studies the impact of meteorites on the surface of the earth in gelatin silver prints of craters, while Marc Yankus looks up and sees *Clouds from My Father's Roof* (2002), a Tiepolo-like study with delicate colors, very different from his portraits and cityscapes and an admirable new direction for the artist.

Some think of Arcadia as an ideal setting for natural man, a paradise, but Lori Nix's chromogenic print *Paradise* (2004) of a glade and waterfall is perfect only at first glance. Then you notice the floating barrels from some sort of wreck. Her sly color photos rely on table-top set-ups that she manages to make look almost real. Her *Hummingbirds* (2009) seem like she's following in the footsteps of the 19th-century painter Martin Johnson Heade until you realize that these little birdies have no feathers and can't make a sound.

More straightforward is British photographer Stephen Wilkes's view of the sublime in his *Alaska Glacier with Climber* (2008) in which a tiny figure trudges up icy blue crests.

Wave (Silver) (2006) by Aziz & Cucher is something different, a scanned photo of a breaker that gets pulled apart and then built up in layers into a semblance that's decorative and oddly textured yet haunted by the initial image. The pair call this and similar works in this series that blend the natural and artificial "synaptic bliss" or here "Scenapse." I call it intriguing, especially with the silver paper giving this particular work a decided shimmer.

Karen Gunderson is the one painter here. Her all-black, thickly stroked oil *Arcadia* gets its image purely from the light falling on brushstrokes, which adds a subtle, beguiling third dimension to the work. This is one of a series of all-black paintings by this artist, who has painted clouds, constellations and even portraits of Barack and Michele Obama using the same method.

"Arcadia," June 11-Aug. 14, 2009, at ClampArt, 531 West 25th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001