



An Eternal Telling of Some Kind of Dream

It is nice out today, don't you think? The trees swaying in the wind on a partly sunny day during this year's *fall*. Yellows and blues and oranges and greens intermix among the cooling chill and crisp air. The sun eyes us from the sky, the great iris of the firmament. Hills roll and paths wind. We, the house-ridden, must see our ecology in total as we toss kindling into our fireplaces and stoves, sending that sensuous smoke into the atmosphere as the season gets colder. The gray will descend on us slowly like a creeping fog, obfuscating the external as we retreat into the internal which pops with color in the caverns of our consciousnesses. These caverns full with images and symbols and signs and memories, which morph into and out of one another while emotions and intuitions and ideas cohere in a space of real duration.

What is that throughway between the external and internal if not a portal or series of portals laid bare? Here, in Brian Scott Campbell's recent paintings, grays and blacks wash over these idylls. Gray, that ashen color that speaks to the past, that speaks to haziness and cloudiness, is abundant—a color that is halfway between the demonstrative whites and blacks or perhaps one that drags itself away from those two poles, a color that is itself a portal. We look upon the land and look into our interior scapes, the artist providing gates between these spaces. Spaces? Existences! Fixities which then move because the eyes shift between planes and vision doubles and softens and we enter another place. Buzzing fuzzy vision, the kind where one sits wide-eyed, dazed, staring into space as the clarity of vision comes and goes—between realities: the one out there and the one in here.

These are Campbell's paintings, depicting landscapes like passing breaths. They are routine but otherworldly—one and the same—filling what space there is between painting and drawing, abstraction and representation. The immediacy of his marks and his economical approach to making show us that he is a drawer's painter. The lines are wide but not heavy, quick but gentle and conscientious of their forms, which at times build compositions of organic fluidities that threaten a biomorphic transition to pure abstraction. A portal to a *Glen* (2020) in which three block forms (trees we suspect) appear to be in the process of gobbling

the scene they frame. Painted in three different tones of gray, each has its own character of mark-making which draw the eye to the surface of the canvas: sinuous, flecked, blotched, speckled, and so on. That flatness challenges the conventions of pictorial space in order to push form, line, and surface to create collision-like exchanges of symbols and shapes. It's velveting texture lying somewhere between the additive and subtractive, as if Campbell is consistently layering and erasing throughout the making of each painting. They are like image transfers—you know, the type made famous by Rauschenberg, in which appropriated photographs are transferred from their source by way of solvents such as lighter fluid and which inevitably leave a faded and incomplete image? Incomplete, like memories or old paintings hung across a window in our grandparents' houses, with that constant successive yet slow burning ultraviolet light that ate away at their surfaces.

Which reminds me, where is the light in these paintings? The sun is there almost always, but where are its lines? It's shadows? Flash! That's it. A flash like an image in our mind, like a synapse firing off. Campbell's use of flashe, a vinyl-based paint that dries with a matte surface quality accentuates the texture of the gessoed canvas which peeks through the artist's brushstrokes. These works are not made to provide a sense of realistic space and are not windows per se, but rather are representative of an interior sensation in which light emanates from sources unknown, carried along by the image itself. The gritty textured canvas and the tempera-like brushstrokes suggest an eternal telling of some kind of dream, like the many caverns that hold ancient stories. We can now see Campbell's paintings float on their substrates like successive sensations that,

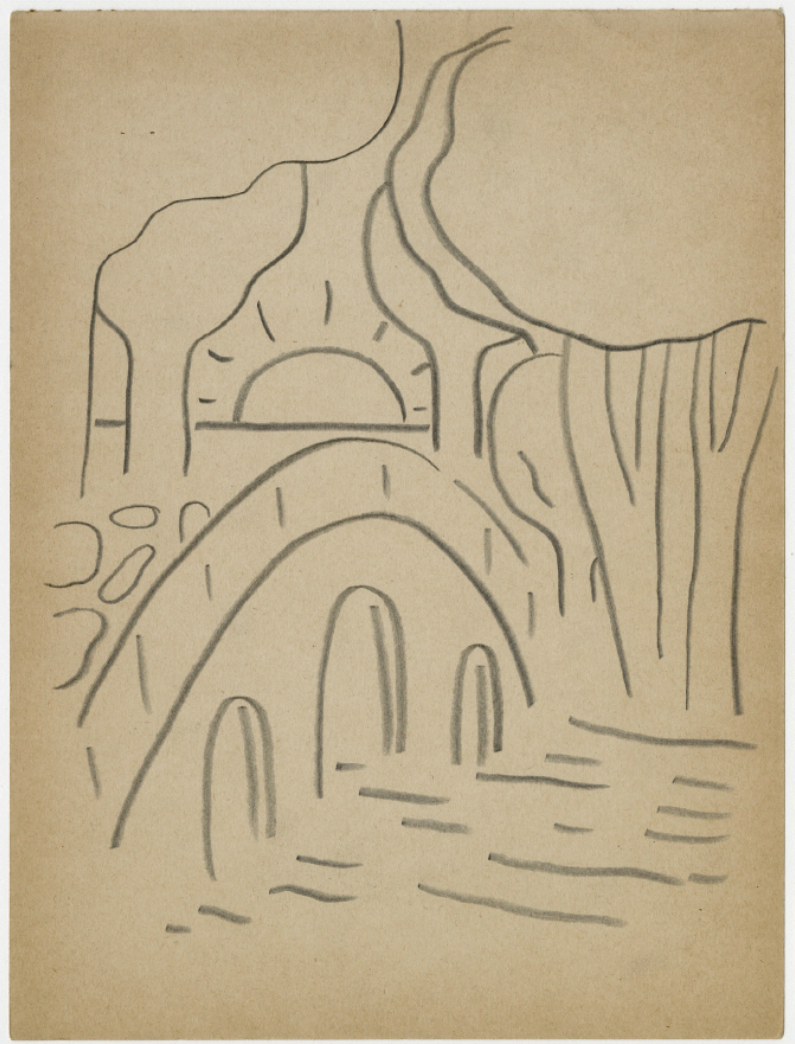
although dissolving into one another, retain something of the mutual externality which belongs to their objective causes; and thus our superficial psychic life comes to be pictured without any great effort as set out in a homogenous medium. But the symbolic character of such a picture becomes more striking as we advance further into the depths of consciousness: the deep-seated self which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up, is a self whose states and changes permeate one another and undergo a deep alteration as soon as we separate them from one another in order to set them out in space.¹

This space—whether of the exhibition or this publication—becomes one

which exudes Campbell's folkloric vernacular and is punctuated by the real scale of the works: each painting at sixteen-by-twenty inches and each drawing at nine-by-twelve or eight-by-ten inches.ⁱⁱ In this way, the works prioritize the images themselves and the qualities with which the artist paints. The democracy and economy of the artist's language becomes another threshold through which we may pass. Every painting is depicted with a straight on point of view, oriented with human eyes and hung at eye level. The symbolic forms—of trees, paths, houses, clouds, boats, fields, hills, fences, the sun, and so on—are simplified but not reductive. They are made with concision and intention, and so, are easily read. Can you see? These paintings existing between our reality of the physical world and a Seussian world full of subversive joy and hallucinatory vision.

The wavering simplicity within the normal human perspective, like mirages of heat-waved vistas or scenes reconstructed from a fever-pitch dream, becomes a lynchpin between our waking lives and those of some unknown plane. In *Someday* (2020) Campbell shelters us beneath a canopy of gray before a stream that contains a leaflike canoe causing ripples in the water. An orange sun draws our eye towards the sky and to what may cause the sun to appear that color: fires in the distance perhaps, to the west and, more generally, to a world on fire. Color marks a significant role throughout his paintings as if in a process of fading away or being covered up or, if we are to be optimistic, is in the process of breaking through. In *Float* (2020), yellow peeks through the blackened trees that frame the scene. Blue from sea and sky, in the cliffs, beneath the house where the viewer spots the azure dotting of the canvas pattern and so, blue grounds us even in our dwellings. Like dreams color morphs, fades, and bursts in ways that are recognizable but somehow off. It is "as if we can scrape the color off the iris and still see."ⁱⁱⁱ *Good News* (2020) depicts a bright large yellow sun rising (or is it setting?) over an idealistic vista of rolling hills. Two sinuous trees in their Seussian glory frame the image, directing our gaze across the rolling hills and at the sun. The bright large sun exploding its rays. It is good news, this warm yellow.

And we laugh because what is there left to do? Spurred on by contradictory elements both visual and conceptual, Campbell employs a piercing



irony ripe with conscientious use of cliché and sentimentality, antipodal elements, and tongue-in-cheek wit, all which remind us that humor is necessary if we are to move onward and see the world. See the sole mountaintop above which a bright sun shines its *Guiding Light* (2019)? Again, there! That warm yellow high up in the sky. Our vision is pulled to it through the woods along a serpentine path, and we laugh like Budai laughs as he saunters along his path. We laugh because we know better, this is silly, that old stale religiosity that wants us to stare at the sun and blind ourselves! And before we reach that mount where now a yellow sun gives way to an orange one like before., here under that monolith a *Harbor* (2019) in which a boat rocks about. It is one of them *Dockers* (2020) near the shore that, in the end, smiles back at us its flat face now somewhere else content, happy, on the other side of a stone wall. There are always opposing forces, like *Town and Country* (2020), which teeter at the edge of a precipice but not in a dualistic way, as in good and evil, but rather as in a compendium of syntheses that consistently undermine each other, play off one another, and wink at us forcing laughter deep in our bellies, perhaps under our bellies, in our collective underbelly.

When one tries to hold on to an image, an appearance rather, not one that is solid in the world—which in itself is slowly losing itself—but one that is in the mind, that image may remain for a longer period of time, but what truly occurs is the recognition of, and keen attention to, that image's ultimate finitude. There is something in these works that feels like an ever-layering disintegration, like memories called up and then lost, or afterimages which impede our vision but fade in their inverse ephemerality. Like the everyday paths, the yearly midsummer days, the bridges which become cartoon eyes peeking into the frame, the boats which put us in the bathtubs of our youths, the distances full of mountains, swaying trees, flowing rivers, the comfort cabin out of reach, these images are a form of working towards unending horizons. Campbell has set us out to wander and wander and wonder and wander, seeking spaces which often fade and yet

the further we wander, the further the horizon recedes. One cannot even say that one is approaching the horizon. The things that stood on the horizon, the towers of a far-off city, or the crest of a mountain range, may come nearer as one approaches them, and the masts of a ship

at sea may rise above the horizon. The horizon always remains the same. As I move, it moves with me. This is particularly noticeable where individual forms retreat and the horizon is delineated with particular obtrusiveness. A traveler in the steppes reports that there is something frightening about being imprisoned for ever by the same, eternally accompanying horizon.^{iv}

You ever grab at a fading image in the mind? Clench your jaw and squeeze your eyes tight hoping to keep it there just a bit longer? I think of today, this nice fall day and its bright light and crisp air, the beauty of the world even in turmoil, in these paintings. They fill up an ever-evolving horizon that we carry around with us—a constant appearing and disappearing horizon, and one at which we grasp and grasp as it fades. In *Home & Garden* (2020), we are behind the white picket fence looking to the other side just like we were one-hundred years ago when Paul Strand photographed *The White Fence* in *Port Kent* (1916). So are we finally home? Where we can tend the garden, live ecologically sound with the land, live comfortably with our loved ones basking in memories and pure experiences? Or is this but some bright-eyed daydream depicting a terra incognita that lives in the caverns of our mind, just out of reach? It matters not, for these paintings, these *images*, tell us of the stories which we all have and must not forget—the stories which behold the world of sensory perceptions and feelings and intuitions and ideas that fill our waking and sleeping lives under the great weight of that real duration to which we must succumb. I mean, what better place to abandon ourselves?

— Colin Edgington

i. Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by Frank Lubecki Pogson. (New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 125.

ii. Reminiscent of Campbell's teacher Thomas Nozkowski's famous approach to art making, avoiding that grandiose "imperialistic" scale for something reasonable and existential.

iii. Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets*. (Jonathan Cape, 2017), 34.

iv. Bollnow, Otto Friedrich. *Human Space*. Translated by Christine Shuttleworth, (London: Hyphen Press, 2011), 73.

Brian Scott Campbell: Better Homes and Better Gardens

There are ways in which the works of Brian Scott Campbell are similar to animations. They're modest, while being somewhat off kilter and funny. They're also given to a certain degree of extravagance. Throughout *Home & Garden*, Campbell makes a strong case for the marriage of art and entertainment—which, in the final analysis, translates into the union of perception and imagination.

It seems to me that cartoons often possess a biting immediacy that more realistic modes of representation can only hint at. A cartoon is typically a work rendered by hand; so it's a collection of gestural elements in every part. This being the case, a lone detail can of itself turn into a narrative, speaking subconsciously (as it were) to the viewer without words. While realism, especially of the filmic variety, can only hope to communicate a detail's significance through a sequence of related images, cartoons intrinsically possess narrative potential at every moment. Campbell's paintings and drawings can be interpreted along similar lines. At once brilliant and pointed, the richness of his vision stems from a practice that allows aspects to become stories.

Campbell is nothing if not a strategist. Whatever might happen in a picture, either by luck or by chance, takes on the eloquence of a riddle. A painting like *Hideaway* (2020), for example, unravels into such a disparity of spatial perspectives and painterly variations, it's impossible to view it as anything less than a visual essay on influence and the claims influence has on an artist. All of this is condensed into a momentary pictorial stasis, like a whimsical piece of fairytale.

The way details unpack into a sort of story mode lends Campbell's works a narrative agency. One always feels as if something warm and intimate has transpired, or that some signal event will soon take place. Despite this, in the teeth of the indubitable presence of something going on, and the feeling that something momentous is about to occur, the works featured in *Home & Garden* don't have an illustrative quality.

Let's examine a work like *Mid Summer* (2020). On a purely descriptive level, the outline of a window frame is more than suggested. It's through this very frame that an imagined viewer (which becomes identical with the actual viewer) looks out onto a body of water painted with the same

gestural intensity as the craggy rocks delimiting it. A mountainous background, above which hover milky moustaches of cloud, has a seemingly casual, yet rigorously constructed immensity to it. While the brushstrokes in the picture's foreground writhe with furtive life, the background has a wrought solidity. This, of course, only becomes apparent when one really parses the logic of the painting, reducing it to almost magical methods.

A recurring motif in *Home & Garden* (2020) is a shy yellow sun. In works like *Dockers* (2020), *Hideaway* (2020), and *Town and Country* (2020), the sun takes on an animistic presence. It only peeks out from behind mountains and trees. In another painting, *Like a Bridge* (2020), the sun stands out more prominently, perched in the sky with the glowing confidence of a toddler. What's significant about these orbic representations of the sun is how its yellow coloring tends to flow into the rest of the picture. Quite literally, the sun's light is a backdrop against which all other objects are situated. In *Dockers* (2020), this is especially apparent. The sun's yellow coloration is an all but invisible substrate in terms of which a collage of spatial elements can gather. These elements—a white sail, wave crests, the bark of a tree—are symbols as much as objects, lyrical icons which exist in the storied ether of memoried perception.

Other paintings, like *Turnip* (2020), seem less like memories than potential vistas the artist would like to see. But if we combine both memory and imagined potentiality together, we reach a point where art and entertainment converge. On this plane of spiritual balance, there's a rhythmic equivalence between the virtual and the actual, possibility and memory, word and object.

Rendering primitive, almost minimalistically restricted forms in such a way that they seem possessed of a covert history, Campbell's pictures take on an uncanny aspect. However distant from experience they may at first appear, his work underscores the hieroglyphic significance of both the natural and man-made world. Through the lens of his artistry, everyday perception becomes so much more strange, yet also more inviting. Translating the ordinary into the numinous, he asks viewers to revisit that which is closest to them: the contingency of awareness, that per diem miracle we wake up with each day, adrift on a sea of unwritten experience, emanating a mysterious inner light.

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Preface

Working within the bounds of a tightly defined, yet painterly and expressive visual style, Brian Scott Campbell's paintings radiate an inner mysticism and profound stillness. Seaside landscapes, country homes, and other bucolic scenes are simplified geometrically, and rendered in a muted palette of predominantly blue and gray hues. Hints of bare canvas appear through Campbell's thin washes, emphasizing the paintings' material nature and placing a categorical distance between the viewer and the work as an aesthetic object.

At once weathered and "hand-made", with several pieces bearing the appearance of aged prints, the works in *Home & Garden* nonetheless bear a marked softness. In *Dockers* (2020) and *For Robert* (2020), forms reduced to their simplest geometric foundations maintain a certain fuzziness, as if delineated with a finger rather than a brush. Straight lines seldom appear in Campbell's work, lending paintings like *Mid Summer* (2020) a hazy, undulating quality accented by his translucent application of paint.

Campbell's use of flashe, a vinyl based paint that dries in particularly thin layers, captures traces of his hand, preserving a complicated mesh of variable brushstrokes. On full display in *Glen* (2020), densely clustered stippled brushwork alternates with long, fluid strokes, creating a parallel pictorial drama as different mark-making techniques refract off each other. In other works, Campbell manipulates the viscosity of his paint, creating alternately "wet" and "dry" passages.

As if hovering just beyond our grasp, the paintings in *Home & Garden* are enigmatic and nebulous, with their flat planes and thickly outlined objects suggestive of a secret ulterior meaning. Though lacking their nervous energy and *horror vacui*, or avoidance of empty spaces, Campbell's paintings evoke both Outsider art, as well as referencing the grainy, roughly drawn work of Jean Dubuffet. In a collection of drawings exhibited along with the paintings, quick, energetic lines mark trees, homes, and other elements, offering a glimpse of the paintings stripped of their painterly heft. Set against the light, sparse drawings, Campbell's extraordinary ability to conjure impressions of volume and weight is amplified, and it is indeed this duality of form and formlessness that is the crux of *Home & Garden*.

— Samir Nedzamar