

MARINA MOEVS

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“Danger Threatens Exhibit’s Hapless Homes”

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Los Angeles Times

Thursday, June 13, 1996, Valley Weekend

Marina Moevs’ paintings, in the capacious, light-filled gallery of the Brand Library, are chilling and beautiful, yet tinged with dread. Her subjects are usually structures in peril, homes threatened, metaphorically and in fact, by destructive forces.

Foggy and muted, her paintings are tinted with irony and gloomy punch lines. Yet the stylized approach of her painting series is so consistent and steady, almost elegant, that the element of danger is apparent only on close inspection.

In “The House and the Flood,” a close-up view reveals that only 1 □ stories out of two are clear of the water that has disrupted life as usual. An idyllic country home appears to be tilting slightly in “The Earthquaked House,” as if falling into an unseen, gaping fissure in the yard. Other homes in the series are partially burnt or are being engulfed by an unsympathetic ocean.

Amid these assorted calamities, even presumably solid houses take on an aura of impending disaster. “House of the Lake,” we somehow expect, will soon be in the lake. The artist also ventures an in-joke by depicting a perfectly sedate suburban cul-de-sac-with swaying palm trees and a feline that may be a predator big cat – and calling the painting “The Dead End.”

Moevs’ underlying agenda seems to be to challenge dearly held beliefs about the security and sanctuary of home. These houses are flimsy and vulnerable to the powerful elements around them. In the case of suburban America, the destructive forces may be ennui or complacency.

Moevs also accents aspects of uncertainty in her works by portraying scenes colored by mystery – a fork in the road, a faint glimpse of a tunnel in the woods, or a road that fades to an abyss-like blackness in the trees.

All of these tactics might seem contrived were it not for the conceptual assuredness and visual continuity of the series, especially as situated in this generous gallery. Moevs deliberately limits her palette to a murky set of greens and blues, awash in gray. Each painting is 64 [sic] inches high, placed low on the gallery walls. The horizon lines in the images sit at eye level, enhancing viewers’ spatial empathy with the scenes.

Each painting is also bisected by a dark line, as if we’re peering through a vertical window. In some paintings, the bisecting line becomes wavy and rough, suggesting the disruption of an earthquake or some cosmic ripple effect.

All told, the series has hypnotic allure, an undercoating of dour humor and ingenuity of design. These paintings seduce the eye even as they plant unpleasant ideas in the subconscious.