

Press Release

Victoria Miro

Inka Essenhigh

3 April – 2 May 2008
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Victoria Miro announces an exhibition by New York-based painter Inka Essenhigh. This new series of large-scale landscape paintings offers a vivid portrayal of the weather and passing seasons. Some of the paintings on view depict nature as a living thing, as in *Yellow Fall* in which the grass and trees become alive, while others personify nature as mythological figures, such as Poseidon in the work titled *Green Sea* or Pegasus in *Wind Tunnel*. *Spring Bar Scene*, which depicts drunken revelers on a warm New York City evening, evokes the changing seasons through its characters' marauding celebration of the warmer weather amidst the bar's outdoor tables.

In these new works, the artist has abandoned the process of automatic drawing as a method of arriving at an unexpected subject matter. Instead, Essenhigh begins with an idea or a feeling, which she then sketches out roughly in studies before putting paint to canvas. The artist's diverse visual vocabulary acquired from years of free association is here harnessed into representing a more positive vision of the world, as well as creating paintings that engage more directly with contemporary issues like global warming.

Essenhigh's painting style continues to move towards an almost sculptural three-dimensionality in its delineation of form, while retaining some of its cartoon tendencies: objects and people take whatever shape the artist feels best fits the emotional content of the paintings. *Snow at Night* for example, shows snow peacefully falling in the longest and darkest night of the year, while the trees pull their branches inward as if to warm themselves in their sleep. The distorted gestures and characteristic elasticity of Essenhigh's figures in paintings such as *Spring* and *Spring Bar Scene* serves to underscore their emotional content.

Essenhigh is one of an acclaimed and successful generation of New York-based painters engaged with figuration as a wholly contemporary endeavor, including artists such as Lisa Yuskavage, John Currin and Will Cotton. Immersed in the city around them, these artists draw on an astute awareness of contemporary culture and infuse their works with a dreamlike, surreal sensibility - often directly related to a particular perception or the atmosphere of an encounter, individual or scene.

Inka Essenhigh was born in 1969 and lives and works in New York. She has had major solo exhibitions at Domus Artium 2 (DA2), Salamanca, Spain, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh and the Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo. Most recently, Essenhigh was featured in *Comic Abstraction*, Museum of Modern Art, *USA Today*, The Royal Academy of Art, London and the 2004 São Paulo Biennial. She has also participated in major exhibitions at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, the Des Moines Art Center, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, Tate Gallery Liverpool, SMAK Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuelle Kunst, Ghent, and P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center, New York.

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open Tuesday to Saturday
10am to 6pm, admission free
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tubes, Old Street and Angel