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Art in Review



Derek Eller Gallery

"Horses" (2006) by Dan Torop, from a show at the Derek Eller Gallery through July 13.

Dan Torop

Snowbound

Derek Eller

615 West 27th Street, Chelsea
Through July 13

Last summer Dan Torop, with Justine Kurland, organized an exhibition of photographs from the 19th through 21st century titled "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts." It was accompanied by a somewhat startling statement: "For us, the photographer is a seeker of mystery and the act of photographing casts a spell that turns the banal into the supernatural." The show proposed a history of photography that emphasized "the spiritual over the rational."

This summer Mr. Torop delivers a similar manifesto with his own photographs. Many were taken in northern Iceland last year and depict a fairy-tale landscape of glaciers, water, mist and celestial effects.

There are also images of Monkey Mountain in Colorado, cloaked in snow; a blurred image of a lake in upstate New York that updates Edward Steichen's Pictorialism; and inkjet prints that use digital methods to conjure ethereal effects.

The photograph that most struck me is a windswept close-up of grazing horses. Unapologetically romantic and wistful, it's hard not to read this Hallmark-greeting-card image as a response to the irony-laden or conceptually rigorous forms of photography that have dominated the last few decades.

Mr. Torop's dreamy vision registers as a challenge: You don't believe in magic?

But for all its passive-aggressive posturing, Mr. Torop's show coincides with a swing in the pendulum away from large-scale photography that lectures on late capitalism or the medium as a fabricated fiction toward a practice that revives discourses on magic and spirituality. (Last summer brought "The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult" at the Met; "Strange Magic," a show of contemporary photographs is currently on view at Luhring Augustine in Chelsea.)

So while Mr. Torop and Ms. Kurland seemed like harbingers or anomalies last year, making claims for magic doesn't seem quite as startling now.

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