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painting

# Fantasy meets history

Luke Painter's superimposed images have a disorienting effect By DAVID JAGER

**LUKE PAINTER** at Angell Gallery (890 Queen West), to April 26. 416-530-0444. Rating: **NNN**

THE PRECISION OF LUKE PAINTER'S work makes it hard to detect that the diffusion and dislocation of genre is what he's after. Yet his series of large, stark landscapes and portraits (actually hand-painted with India ink to resemble wood engraving) are all about superimposing the historical and the fantastical.

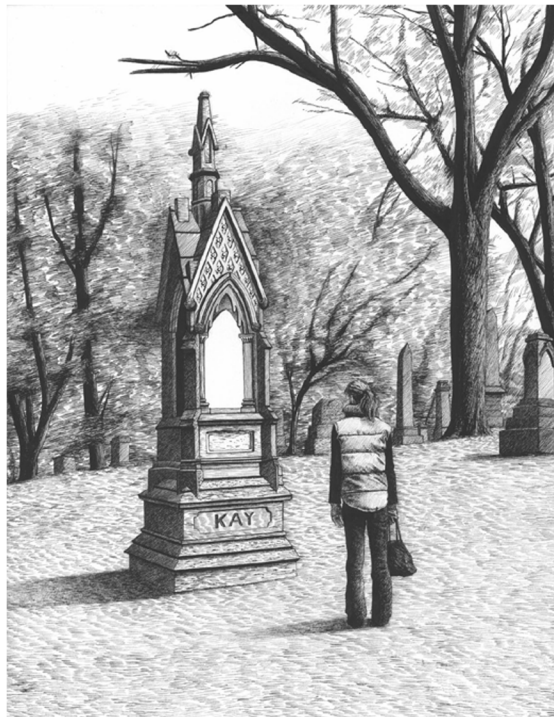
In each of the seven pieces in this show, Painter mixes the possible (as envisioned by industrialists, architects and visionaries) with the fictional (as it appears in media and in dreams). The result is an interstitial visual world that borrows from the rigour of Victorian engraving and architectural illustration while overlaying it with subtle references to pop culture, science fiction and utopian fantasy.

The effects can be disorienting. In *The Harbour (Malting)*, Painter imagines Toronto's lakeshore malting plant without the lake, surrounded instead by an eerie forest of denuded trees and stumps. He's also fond of putting elaborate architectural fantasies on platforms supported by stilts (much like mid-20th century plans for utopian future cities), as in *The Adams Family Home*.

His portraits can be even more enigmatic. In *Victorian Bust*, floating patterns that turn out to be ornamentation borrowed from suits of armour are superimposed on the meti-

culously painted image of a young woman. Without this knowledge, however, the patterns look vaguely internal or anatomical, creating a sort of queasy tension heightened by the doll-like lustre of her face.

Pulling out all the threads of Painter's reference sets, in fact, isn't something you could do even after several viewings. There are nods to historical archives, engineering diagrams, the ideas of architects and futurologists, the novels of Jules Verne and Stephen King.



Luke Painter's *Kay (Necropolis)* places fictional elements in a real setting.

These same sets of eclectic references can make these works seem remote and abstracted, and their hyper-stylized execution may leave the viewer feeling vaguely puzzled and cold.

There is no arguing, however, with his incredible technique or the singularity of his vision. His pictures are glimpses into an elaborately constructed visual world that is nothing if not unique. ©

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