

'Verdant' group exhibition at The Art Pavilion, London 8th-13th July 2022.

Michael Hugh Eden, contributed 3 works:-

Woodwose I (sentinel), (2022), 60 x 60cm, oil on canvas.

Woodwose II (storm coming), (2022), 60 x 60cm, oil on canvas.

Woodwose III (psychodrama landscape), (2022), 61x 76cm, oil on canvas.

Artist Statement

Thinking here of Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) I'm attempting to develop this idea (weirdness) in relation to time 'the concept of fate is weird in that it implies twisted forms of time and causality that are alien to ordinary perception' (Fisher, 2016). This is toxic to the pastoral mode and ideas of nation and permanence which that mode of representation gives force to. Despite pastoral landscape seeming harmless or irrelevant and hardly worth a critique (given its apparent unpopularity in avant-garde art circles) it's actually very powerfully operational in the mythos of most contemporary ideas about nation, boundaries and of course the past, think of the way the English landscape is treated in *Downton Abby* (2010) and its many imitators, television, film and political ideology (especially in tabloids) reproduces many depictions of functioning and harmonious stratified societies (nostalgia and fantasy machines serving as auto-apologists for empire and racism).

The Woodwose was a myth or trope of the Wildman that fascinated the medieval mind and pretty much disappeared with expansion and exploration, when otherness was more conveniently projected onto 'noble' and or 'vicious' so called savages (people from other places). The figure of the savage forest man or spirit was closer to home pre empire expansion and was probably a cultural memory of ancestors such as hunter gatherer peoples mixed with paranoia and fascination with outsiders, hermits and pagan gods (while also being somewhat dependant on the wilderness as a then un-policeable space) a heady mix of real and projected danger onto nature its self.

Here I have tried to draw on a little celebrated landscape-mode to aid in my depiction of a woodwose that of the dinosaur book or manual, often targeted at children in the 1980s. Such books were rather scientific and matter of fact in their written content in the 1980s and were popular with children (I suspect) because like my younger self they had images of seemingly monstrous and fantastical dinosaurs that were the focus, or the pay-off of the book for the child who read the descriptions and drew from the pictures. The images foregrounded the dinosaurs of course but also placed them into primeval landscapes with diagrammatic explanations of geological occurrences and animal behaviour. They were often busy, ominous and full of threatened violence (both coming from eruptions, landslides and falling meteorites as well as predatory behaviour of dinosaurs). Since I was not watching many period dramas as a seven year old child or imbibing propaganda from redtop newspapers, and of course was not going to see pastoral landscapes in art galleries this kind of semi-scientific illustrated book represented my landscape tradition, in its own way, probably very much by accident they were radical publications at least in the sense that I characterise challenges to the pastoral tradition, to nostalgia and the picturesque as radical.

Those manuals were full of images that encouraged a fully temporal view of the outside world informed by deep-time, implying that behind the faux permanence of the Victorian terraces that made up the streets outside my bedroom window and the country houses of popular television programs which flattered viewers with opulent and carefully managed grandeur velociraptors tore things apart, volcanos erupted and leviathans disrupted still surfaces.

The woodwose here is of course also just a fallen tree that looks weird.