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A 21st-Century Painter Forges a Link Between Instagram and the Sublime

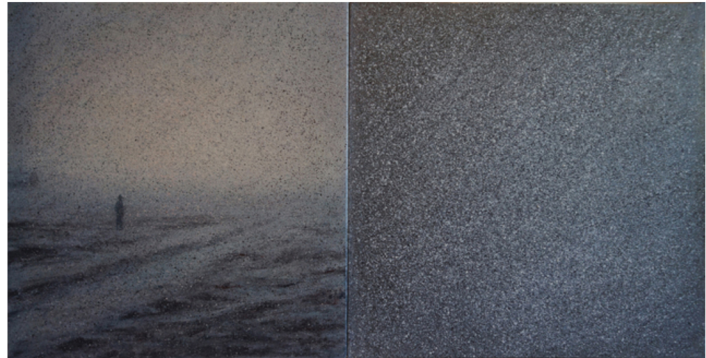
 ARTSY EDITORIAL
3 MINUTES AGO

Instagram has become a popular platform for artists and art lovers, but may be changing the way that we interact and appreciate images. In his new, eighth exhibition at New York's [Nohra Haime Gallery](#), [Adam Straus](#) continues his investigation into our relationship with technology and painting's links to digital imagery.

The show, "[Even the 21st Century Longs for the Sublime](#)," presents a suite of new landscape paintings, which comment—in both their content and their compositions—on the way that cell phone photography may be altering the ways that people interact with images. "My 11-year old son got me interested in Instagram," [says](#) Straus. "I kept looking at how the rectangle is divided up. What interested me was the new universal language that is part image, part blank space with symbols."

Some of the paintings, such as *SHARED LONG ISLAND SOUND* (2014), make this association explicitly. Here, a sea and its horizon are bordered at top and bottom by two neutral bands: one pale beige, the other black. The top margin is inscribed with an off-white arrow pointing left, while the bottom black space is marked with the word "SHARE" and another arrow pointing right. The image, caught between a moment of private admiration and public display, is liminal and indeterminate, a state emphasized by Straus's gauzy painting style and by his depiction of water, which has long carried connotations of movement, change, and passage.

Other paintings have similar borders: *COLORS OF WINTER* (2013) has vertical margins at right and left, similar to those often seen in cell phone videos. Such margins are also found in traditional East Asian [scroll paintings](#) and in the contemporary work of painters such as [Brice Marden](#). Another work, *MONUMENT TO LOOKING AT GRAY AREAS* (2014), juxtaposes a man surveying the coast set side-by-side with a square painting divided horizontally at the center, the top black and the bottom dark gray, resembling a [monochrome](#) diptych.



Adam Straus
MONUMENT: DUSTBOWL, 2014
Nohra Haime Gallery

BIG CLOUD (2014) and *WOODS AND CLEARING: WINTER* (2013) address the ways in which platforms such as Instagram alter the colors and composition of what we see, encouraging users to increase the vivaciousness of cliché pictures (sunsets, seascapes, fields) with artificially enhanced color. And when we compare the vertical or square compositions of several of Straus's canvases to the traditional horizontal landscape of *SEARCH* (2014), one sees the ways in which the constraints of software can rob an image of its full breadth and complexity.

In all these artworks, Straus acknowledges the continued desire for grand [Romantic](#) experiences within the natural world. How they are mediated (through painting, through photography) is a continuing phenomenological question that he and many other artists will no doubt continue to explore for many years.

—[Stephen Dillon](#)

"[Adam Straus: Even the 21st Century Longs for the Sublime](#)" is on view at [Nohra Haime Gallery](#), New York, Feb. 11–Mar. 11, 2015.

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