

Review: Two new exhibits open at the VAC

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Artists Adam Straus and John Monteith dredge up things we would like to stay hidden: careless consumerism and bad year-book pictures.

Straus's work makes my fingers tingle with excitement—he uses the really really good colors in the Crayola box, and welcomes fuchsia, goldenrod, teal, and thistle to his canvases. With child-like exuberance he loads on the paint, adding dimension to his pieces.

Straus chooses to frame his work in lead and steel, emphasizing that the canvas is not the big picture, but only a moment captured. Straus even paints one of his frames; by extending the golden glow beyond the perimeters of the canvas, we wonder where the painting ends and the frame begins. I couldn't help looking for extension cords because I was sure the ethereal skies were backlit. I was wrong.

My favorite piece, "Man on Top of the World", places a tiny background figure far away from the Budweiser can and cigarettes and trash in the foreground. A flower blooms in between the rubbish and under another brilliant cloudscape.

Straus paints postcards of beauty while reminding us that the dirtiness is still there. It struck me how disgusting the brightest, most glorious colors look in neon signs and crass containers of modern convenience. Straus's work is best described in the title of one of his pieces, "The Dark Side of a Once Green Place." Beyond the verdant pastures he includes the toxic run-off that we all know exists.