

ARTFORUM

"Andrea Carlson"

By Susan Snodgrass

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Andrea Carlson, *Cast a Shadow*, 2021, oil, acrylic, gouache, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper, 3' 10" × 15' 2".

The Upper Midwest was once a sprawling habitat of Indigenous wetlands, first lost to colonial settlement, then to modern agricultural development. Today, wetland banks—engineered ecosystems created through market trading that allows developers to buy credits to offset their destruction of wetlands located elsewhere—offer controversial ecological solutions while also obfuscating the region's Indigenous past. This complex history informs *Hydrologic Unit Code 071200—Nibi Ezhi-Nisidawaabanjigaade Ozhibii'igeowin 071200*, 2022, a five-channel video installation by Andrea Carlson, made in collaboration with artist Rozalinda Borcilă, that loops footage of Chicago-area wetland banks, road signs, maps, and running text in stacked bands evoking horizons. The work takes its title from a government coding system that became the prototype for wetland banking, thus linking territorial confiscation, capitalism, and problematic forms of environmental mitigation. The result is a multilayered panorama that further complicates narratives of westward expansion and injustices to the region's Native lands, one of many related themes explored across Carlson's small but forceful show "Shimmer on Horizons."

Throughout her diverse practice, Carlson (who is of Grand Portage Ojibwe/European descent) combines histories of dispossession and destruction with images of Indigenous presence and renewal in landscapes simultaneously real and invented. Inspired by the terrain of her native Minnesota, Anishinaabe storytelling, and popular culture and film, the artist realizes her reimagined vistas in a variety of media, including this exhibition's one sculpture and four paintings. The layered strata of Carlson's video give way in her two-dimensional works to rectangular panes of heavyweight cotton paper. Each one contains a cacophony of images—ranging from shorelines and mounds to animals and flora to masks and cowrie shells—arranged in tiered rows to form one large painting. Carlson's symbolic motifs are rendered in oil, acrylic, gouache, ink, colored pencil, and graphite, all of which remarkably retain the mark of the artist's hand despite their collage-like overlays and repeated appearances across multiple compositions.

Other iconography is at times more opaque and personally derived, as in *Cast a Shadow*, 2021, which features floating idols or dolls and, at its center, a stone tower. The latter is a memorial image created by Ojibwe painter and sculptor George Morrison (1919–2000), whom the work

JESSICA
SILVERMAN

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

commemorates. *Perpetual Care*, 2024, also pays homage to legacies of Indigenous art, including that of Carlson's great-aunt, whose drawing of a white horse the artist appropriates while representing herself as a pair of hands. These themes of cultural ancestry and resilience counter the work's darker connections to racial stereotyping, suggested by the words MONDO CANE (the title of a 1962 Italian documentary that depicts Indigenous and other rituals as "savage") inscribed within the painting.

Perpetual Genre, 2024, is part of the artist's ongoing "Vore" series, started in 2008, which recasts objects from museum collections and elements from "cannibal boom" films (à la *Mondo Cane*) into imaginary, often more stylized landscapes. Here, two statues—one Roman, the other from the sixteenth century—depict figures eating human flesh in front of a foreboding seascape. Each is framed by an oculus and surveying equipment, instruments of territorial conquest deployed as symbols of cultural consumption and theft.

Carlson extends her filmic references by constructing her compositions on a quasi-cinematic scale; the individual panels mimic film cells, lending her narratives a sense of movement. The artist creates an engaging push-pull between parts and wholes, centers and borders that envelop the viewer while denying any singular point of access or view. This strategy is purposeful, disrupting conventions of Euro-American landscape painting and photography by shunning static, idealized vistas devoid of human presence. Instead, Carlson imbues her fragmentary tableaux with Indigenous histories and Native identities, performing an act of artistic reparation that rights the past and envisions a more sovereign future.

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