



ARTBLOG

The People's Landscape by Libby Rosof (excerpt)

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Most of us live in urban and suburban streetscapes. Yet so much art focuses on more romantic notions of nature, neglecting what the familiar paved zones offer in subject matter and imagery. Work now on exhibit at Pentimenti is grappling with its own take on what these human interventions in space and structure mean.

One that nails it is a piece by **Kim Beck** who has created a terrific wall installation of a suburban, parking-lot-ish landscape. We don't see the parking lot, just the specimen plantings, à la a James Audubon bird-on-branch specimen in front of the plain, white-paper, unarticulated sky. What we do see in Beck's landscape is an expanse of unarticulated wall dotted with trees and shrubs planted in concrete-curbed bits of earth. The greenery is expressively drawn with graphite on mylar, the shapes cut out and arranged on the wall. The arrangements seem provisional, and we get to envision in our minds' eye the space where the islands may have been planted.

Beck helps us out by using different scale items, to suggest distance. But each of the little shrubs and trees, each given the name Buoy plus an identifying number, can be purchased alone or with others and a new arrangement is as close as your living room wall! The shrubs, especially, remind me of little domesticated critters, so their mobility from wall to wall, position to position, seems just right. They are also just right in suggesting the arbitrary placement of city green spaces, dictated by the architecture in which they are placed, and not by the laws of nature.

You think you've got a garden, and before you know it, some planner comes along and says it's time for a change, for a new design. He cuts and digs up mature plantings. If we're lucky, he plants in some new location puny new, baby greenery. Often, the old stuff gets chopped and nothing takes its place. But without these small salutes to nature, the landscapes we humans have created are grim and lifeless. City trees and shrubs are like people. Sometimes they flourish in the inhospitable environment, sometimes not. The drawing, basic and unfussy and spontaneous-seeming, also seems like a good fit.