

GALLERIES | CATE MCQUAID

Something to sing about in 'Everyone Has Moved off to One Side'

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, October 3, 2018, 2:43 p.m.



Joe Wardwell's "No Bye, No Aloha" borrows from the Breeders' bleak song "No Aloha." IMAGE COURTESY OF THE LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

Years ago, Joe Wardwell started interlacing text and natural scenes to slyly update the ideals of Hudson River School painters and their ilk. Since then, more content has

seeped in, and Wardwell's paintings have grown sophisticated in their weaving of representation, abstraction, and graphic design. His epic mural, "Hello America: 40 Hits From the 50 States" at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, is bright and sorrowful.

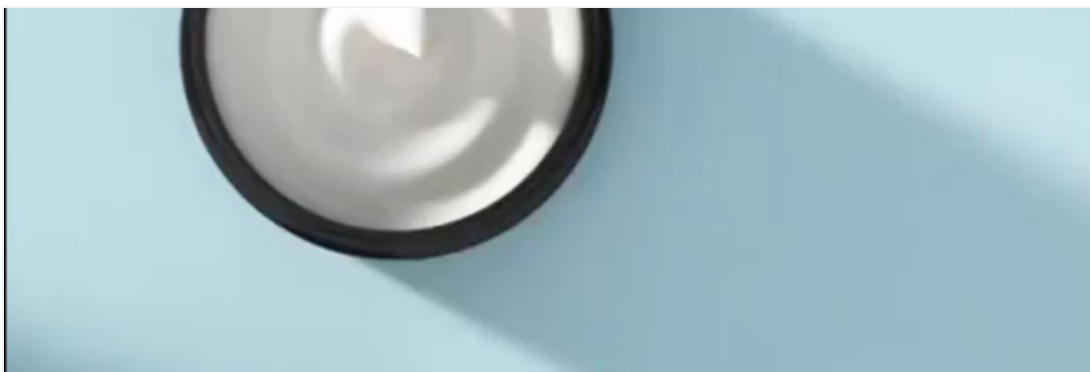
Wardwell's painting show at LaMontagne Gallery, now sharing space with Howard Yezerski Gallery in SoWa, is a kaleidoscopic portrait of Massachusetts. Lyrics from Boston bands twine with woodland scenes pared to silhouettes and soaked in high-keyed hues. Smaller text cascades down each canvas, chattering slogans of Boston-linked luminaries such as Malcolm X and Noam Chomsky.

"No Bye, No Aloha" borrows from the Breeders' bleak song "No Aloha." The lyrics play in bold capitals against a still, twilit pond. The painting sandwiches between fiery blues a yellow-green that in any other context would be noxious.

Within the frame of the text and its ground, Wardwell switches the landscape back and forth with a pattern of pink-and-purple stripes. Even within single letters, the shimmering sky abruptly flips to pattern.

The eye jitters from depth to surface, from picture to pattern, from language to image. Then, upon closer reading, it bumps down the small slogans humming along the chopped up pink-and-purple field: "Integrity is the essence of everything successful" reads one, from R. Buckminster Fuller.

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Everything in Wardwell's paintings pivots, leaving us teetering. The place you'd expect to come to rest — the landscape — is caffeinated; the serenity of a distant vista is fractured and elusive. We can't settle on the bouncing slogans, which feel purposefully pat rather than inspirational. The lyrics, many from late-20th-century punk bands, are disaffected.

The result is at once grand and sour. Natural landscapes are peaceful until we impose our needs and aspirations on them. Those, these paintings seem to say, are poison.

EVERYONE HAS MOVED OFF TO ONE SIDE: New Paintings by Joe Wardwell

At LaMontagne Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through Oct. 16.

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