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Hard Urban Surfaces in a Bucolic Setting

Scott Wolniak's 'Landscape Record' at Lynden Sculpture Garden

[Kat Kneever](#) Jan. 19, 2016 5:05 p.m.



It could be said that Scott Wolniak is something of an excavator. He has a solo exhibition currently on view at the Lynden Sculpture Garden, a bucolic setting of 40 rolling acres dotted with modernist sculpture in River Hills. The first piece that greets the visitor is a large graphite drawing of a tree, commissioned by the Lynden. This note of thoughtful

representation foreshadows a secondary theme in the exhibition, which is primarily more concerned with strata and decay.

Wolniak paints on thick slabs of plaster with surfaces that are intensely marred. They are incised, pummeled and ripped open to reveal layers of hidden material like wire and burlap. The end result is a contrast between innumerable small passages of bright color that pass over a surface eroded in rivulets. Some passages seem like the careful result of the artist's chisel, others have energy more like a desperate attack, a slashing at the surface. The varied approaches come together in compositions that are unerringly complex and unified by their variation. It is not all just for surface effect. The hardness of the paintings' surfaces recalls stone and concrete, reminiscent of the urban environment. Wolniak is based in Chicago and, as noted by curator Nicholas Frank, his interest is directed toward "the crumbling and breaking apart of foundations and underlayments, the grid loosening into gravel and dust." Wolniak stops short of making direct references to a complex and disintegrating city, but instead draws us into contemplation on the processes of change.

The paintings are complemented by drawings that illustrate a similar interest in mark-making. Wolniak's variations of graphite lines, textures and densities make for compelling evocations. They are something like veiled landscapes, particularly reminiscent of Chinese paintings. Wolniak includes more figurative pieces in another part of the gallery. Wander down a long hallway, almost hidden away, to find pieces that reshuffle the artist's textures and lines into images of people and animals. They have interest in their own right and joined with the rest of the exhibition they represent alternate layers of intention formed by the hand of the artist.

"Scott Wolniak: Landscape Record" is on view through Feb. 28 at the Lynden Sculpture Garden, 2145 W. Brown Deer Road. An artist-led tour of the sculpture garden and a video program will be held at Saturday, Jan. 30, at 2 p.m.

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Kat Kneever is a Milwaukee-based writer, musician, and artist. During the several years she has been covering art, the scene has evolved in many ways and she looks forward to sharing her observations with you.