

Johnny DeFeo



Johnny DeFeo lives and works in Denver, Colorado. He earned his MFA in painting from CU Boulder in 2017. During his graduate studies he exhibited in national juried MFA exhibitions in New York and Chicago, and organized exhibitions and collaborative curatorial projects with artists and curators in Boulder and Denver. He is a co-founder of SWAB (Southwest American Bullet), a traveling artist residency organized along with painter Aaron Zulpo. In 2018 and 2019 he has exhibited works nationally and internationally. DeFeo creates artworks, textiles, and tufted yarn wall hangings, all of which belong to the concept of souvenir, attempting to capture the experiences he has in the natural world, where he feels free and most at home.

DeFeo's new body of work is comprised primarily of landscape scenes, most of which include animals. Often, the perspective expressed in these scenes is that of the wildlife portrayed, shifting the subject away from a human vantage point and revealing the mysteries of the natural world. Imagining that the creatures inhabiting America's wilderness could be storytellers through objects and images the way that humans can, these objects portray the natural world with a tender perspective, and with mystical and legendary qualities. The moments DeFeo chooses to portray are sacred and primordial, as if they are the cultural documents of forest dwellers. These scenes don't involve humankind, and have been taking place long before we existed or were paying attention. DeFeo reminds us that waterfalls don't turn off at night. Elk lock antlers without camera crews around to capture them. Sometimes, a wolf will be struck by a rainbow hanging in the mist over a gorge and will stop to marvel at his surroundings.



These works alongside new paintings from DeFeo's Department of the Interior series tell parallel stories of the perceived divide between unmitigated wilderness and human construction. The genre of landscape painting has historically been a tool of the latter, utilizing the land as a stage, or a backdrop, to foreground works of God, of mythic forces, or man's accomplishments. In Department of the Interior, DeFeo explores a similar trope of architecture and design which utilizes the landscape as a feature in a well-designed and covetable piece of real estate. The draw he feels to both vast exterior views and pristine interior spaces like those that fill slick home design magazines, is enacted as paintings of imagined homes with spectacular views and fantastical furniture. Despite the cognitive dissonance produced by seeing some of America's most iconic landscapes through a living room picture window, it's hard to argue that you wouldn't like to live there. That's the power of The Department of the Interior series- it illustrates contemporary society's struggle for balance of our needs for nature vs. culture.



DeFeo illustrates that our relationship to the land is not a simplistic tale of good vs. evil or man vs. nature, but a complex and layered one. These works ask the viewer to listen to the call of the wild, and look for balance in the way they consume, interact, and participate in the dually robust and fragile ecosystems of America.

