

## Muntean/Rosenblum

TEAM

REVIEWS

A young man sleeps, shirtless, beneath a truck. He wakes up—his eyes are a cool blue-green—and strikes out toward a blonde girl slumped in an armchair in the middle of a windswept field: an older man, his face bronzed and wrinkled, emerges from a house and casts a stern gaze over his surroundings. The young man holds his hand above the girl's face, and she stirs, gets up, and joins him on a walk to a nearby trailer. Inside the vehicle, a white-haired man reclines, Christ-like, his aged body partly covered by a crumpled white sheet. A tear meanders down the girl's cheek, and a ponderous, melancholic voice begins a brief soliloquy: "Somewhere along the road, we lose our way. . . ."

*Shroud*, 2006, a ten-minute thirty-eight-second video by Markus Muntean and Adi Rosenblum, echoes the look and mood of their better-known paintings, four large-scale examples of which were also on view in the duo's recent solo debut at Team (their first New York solo show in seven years). The kinds of scenarios presented therein are the artists' stock-in-trade: Figures strike poses that appear at once classically noble and awkwardly contrived, while missions of cosmic import—the origin and purpose of which remain obscure—appear to hang in the air around them. Also familiar, in both the video and the paintings, is an apocalyptic tenor that recalls the emptied-out fictive landscapes of Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1988) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006).

Assembling their young heroes from fragments excised from fashion and youth-culture magazines, the artists engineer a deliberately awkward fusion of timeless (if nebulous) wisdom and perpetual (if perpetually bland) youth. In *Untitled (The landscape looked both . . .)*, 2006, for example, five young men and a young woman congregate on a train track, a cluster of urban housing projects looming in the background. One of the group surveys the scene from the middle distance while another lies in between the tracks. Standing on the rail beside him, a hooded man hangs his head and reaches forward in a diverlike pose. Another gestures skyward as if summoning an angelic host—or an air strike. Everyone seems burdened by unspeakable angst; no one looks directly at anyone else. The work's caption, lettered in neat but casual-looking capitals, reads: THE LANDSCAPE LOOKED BOTH NAKED AND HIDDEN. THERE WAS NO GOING THERE, NO THERE TO GO, NEITHER DESTINY NOR DESTINATION. JUST THE FEELING OF ABSENCE.

Yet, by rendering their subjects in a naturalistic-romantic style that has nonetheless something of the feel of generic children's book illustration (the images' clean color and vignettelike rounded edges only add to this connotation), Muntean/Rosenblum seem to align the end-times desolation to which *Untitled's* caption alludes with openness to fresh beginnings. The lofty aphorisms they deploy (these are also "sampled," Jenny Holzer-like, from a variety of unacknowledged sources) are oblique accompaniments to their images rather than illustrations or reinforcements of the pictorial content, and the pathos that haunts every scene floats free of the allegorical weight to which the body of work seems to allude. The artists trade in what Muntean terms "precise ambiguity," playing philosophy as be-all and end-all against philosophy as T-shirt slogan to generate a sublime uncertainty with a slow-burning emotional tug. As the narrator of *Shroud* intones: "It's neither death nor life that we want—it's that other thing shining in the depths of our longing, so we can only watch and wonder and wait in vain, and in the end we might simply drift away, drift and dissolve, become a shimmer of light, slowly fading into nothing."

Muntean/Rosenblum, *Untitled (The landscape looked both . . .)*, 2006, oil on canvas, 86½ x 102".

