

## **IMPRESSIONS OF COLORADO - DAN HAYS AT SOUTHAMPTON CITY GALLERY**

By Caroline Lewis – 09/08/2006 – [www.24hourmuseum.org.uk](http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk)

Art made on computers may seem the antithesis of old fashioned painting on canvas, but artist Dan Hays takes digital manipulation of images as a central theme in his painting.

His exhibition, Impressions of Colorado, at Southampton City Art Gallery until August 27 2006, links the process and the artifice of painting to the precision of technology, in particular focussing on photography and the effect it has on how we view scenes of nature.

As inspiration, Hays took a collection of poor quality jpeg images he'd discovered on the website of another Dan Hays. The photographs were of mountainous Colorado landscapes, and with the permission of their author, the artist played with notions of appropriation by making a series of paintings from the images.

Hays sketched and distorted the source material, creating a pixellated on-screen image. This, he faithfully transcribed in paint, resulting in an image abstract and realist at once, exploring methods of constructing and perceiving images.

While the painted scenes are beautiful, imbued with the awe-making quality of sublime nature, the works also remind us how often it is a second-hand view, seen through a flickering and filtered screen. The pictures are pretty, bright and seductive – and entirely synthetic, repeated shapes and patterning disrupting the realist element.

Dan Hays is often concerned with making cultural and psychological metaphors in this way, looking primarily at photography's manipulation of reality. For the past four years, he has been investigating the way computers break down and reconfigure photographic images, and how this informs perceptions of the natural world.

He is influenced by the effects of electronic reproduction that informed works by Gerhard Richter, Roy Lichtenstein and Patrick Caulfield in the 20th century. His paintings of guinea pig cages, created in the late 1990s, used 3D computer modelling as a tool in their production. It was his 1997 painting of an empty, oversized cage, entitled Harmony in Green, that brought him to public attention when it won the John Moores Painting Prize.

Subsequent work with forest imagery marked a transition from using computer software as an aid in production to examining the visual by-products of its implementation.

Impressions of Colorado not only takes the themes of digital compression and reproduction, quality of image and authorship, but also draws comparisons with Impressionist painting. Both this and the distortion caused by digital reproduction call into question the value of 'high quality', high fidelity imaging.