

Johanna Fateman, "Emma Webster," *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2021.

THE NEW YORKER 100

ART

EMMA WEBSTER

By Johanna Fateman

September 17, 2021

Thirteen new paintings in this Los Angeles-based artist's current show, at the Alexander Berggruen gallery, are windows onto a high-key, ultra-verdant world—a sublime, supernatural realm that combines the thaumaturgic light of the Hudson River School with the watchful marshes and sinuous undergrowth in Disney's "Maleficent." It's an imaginative approach to the centuries-old genre of landscape, one that the artist shares with other Fauvist-inspired contemporary painters, including Shara Hughes and Matthew Wong. But the strange, engulfing sense of depth in Webster's luscious canvases also hints at the 3-D seduction of virtual-reality adventures, as suggested by such works as the vertical "Golden Hour," in which a purple river winds into the horizon. (The show's title, "Green Iscariot," adds an enigmatic layer with its invocation of betrayal.) Perhaps these passionately rendered paintings, which conjure up lashing winds ("World in Flux") and wildfires ("Weather System"), reflect once familiar vistas that have been rendered otherworldly, made hostile by the climate crisis. (*Berggruen; Sept. 8-Oct. 14.*)

Published in the print edition of the September 27, 2021, issue.

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