

JAY SENETCHKO

The Course of a Distant Empire

NOVEMBER 23, 2017 - JANUARY 18, 2018 @ WINSOR GALLERY

OPENING RECEPTION: NOVEMBER 23, 6 - 8 PM

258 EAST FIRST AVENUE VANCOUVER BC

JAY SENETCHKO :: PRESS RELEASE

About the Exhibition

The Course of a Distant Empire visualizes the tension of our present historical situation by collapsing antagonistic acts from past, present and future into single images, setting them in a cyclical format, and implying their repetition. Acts are made, others cancel them. The goals of one person impede those of another. Progress is made, but immediately encounters an obstacle or an equally regressive act. Mobility becomes impossible; and in its place, a migration towards the poles of decadence and destruction serves as a substitute.

Consistent with previous exhibitions, Senetchko created an all-encompassing sensory installation whose central element were 5 large scale, classically framed paintings. Winsor Gallery was transformed to accommodate the works and create the necessary environment. The gallery space was painted black and concealed from the front entrance by floor-to-ceiling black velvet curtains, providing viewers with an initial reveal of the suite, and an intimate atmosphere in which to view the pictures. A central mechanical mobile (built by Senetchko) rotated 20 iPhones hung in a parabola pattern echoing the mountain range presented in the paintings. The mobile completed a complete revolution every 25 minutes, the same amount of time the video and audio file played by each phone took to complete one full cycle. Each phone showed looping panoramic videos taken by Senetchko over the past decade during hikes in the Canadian Rocky Mountains which were set to TS Eliot's reading of his 1922 *Wasteland*. At the completion of each recitation, the video and audio would repeat. The cycle repeated indefinitely.

The combined elements of the installation created an atmosphere of circularity, repetition, opulence, and unease.

About Winsor Gallery

Founded by Jennifer Winsor in 2002, Winsor Gallery (www.winsorgallery.com) has distinguished itself locally, nationally, and internationally as a premier source for contemporary art. Winsor Gallery strives to ensure the long-term development of our artists' careers through promotion, collaboration, and thoughtful curation.

A cornerstone of the Vancouver art scene, Winsor relocated from its seminal South Granville space in 2012 to the burgeoning industrial neighborhood of The Flats, located on East 1st Avenue. Innovation compelled by artistic curiosity, Winsor Gallery continues to modernize the contemporary art scene of Vancouver by hosting an annual bloc party in The Flats, facilitating an art collective between galleries in order to showcase the most experimental, progressive, contemporary art on the West Coast.



The Course of a Distant Empire Installation at Winsor Gallery November 2017



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The Fire Sermon, Oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 183cm x 244cm, Jay Senetchko, 2017



A Game of Chess, Oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 183cm x 244cm, Jay Senetchko, 2017



The Burial of the Dead, Oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 183cm x 244cm, Jay Senetchko, 2017



Death by Water, Oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 183cm x 244cm, Jay Senetchko, 2017



What the Thunder Said, Oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 183cm x 244cm, Jay Senetchko, 2017

Tangled Hierarchies: Remnants, collective endurance and strange loops

Essay by Sunshine Frère, 2017

A strange loop is a phenomenon that occurs when someone, or something, moves either upwards, downwards or through multiple levels of an abstracted hierarchical system. At some point, moving through the system, the person or thing doing the moving, unexpectedly arrives back where they or it started. MC Escher's Lithograph, *Drawing Hands* (1948) illustrates this concept in a succinct manner. These types of experiments form what author Douglas Hofstadter describes as a *tangled hierarchy*, "a complex system where beginning and ending are undefined, and even the direction or movement of a system is not apparent"¹.

The Course of a Distant Empire, is an installation by artist Jay Senetchko, it consists of five large-scale paintings. The artist invites the viewer to navigate a maze of strange loops within this series. Tangled hierarchies of communal polytely and historical referencing, conflate past, present and future. All tenses collide, forming a cacophonous vortex.

A cluster of human figures feature prominently in all five paintings, the majority of them carve out a large elliptical shape in the foreground on each canvas. The group is not exactly a unified anomaly, they are more of a loose configuration of active beings, in close proximity. Process and polytely feature overtly; each individual, or small group, is focussed on the completion of a particular task: the removal of debris, the building of a fence, barbecuing, thinking, clearing snow, or even, simply relaxing. What we observe is a collective of people working, but not necessarily symbiotically towards a common goal. This central foregrounded space is simultaneously everyone's, and yet, also, no one's; a busy *commons* of sorts where intertwined cycles of action and non-action recur throughout the seasons. An interesting tension is established between the individual and the collective in this series.

A sea of red poppies coats a huge portion of the surface of *What the Thunder Said*, a bewitching depiction of summer. The people of the commons perform contemplative gestures, relaxing on a blanket, stopping to chat, daydreaming. Traces of productivity hang in the air, the laundry is being put out to dry, truck parts, buckets and fan belts are left in limbo - part of a project that is finished, or something to start, it is not clear. This scene is arguably the most pastoral of the series; visual tropes form tethers that connect it to genre painting and even abstraction. Senetchko's colour palette, particularly in reference to the clothing on the figures, is a nod, not only to Malevich's abstract *Peasant Paintings*, but also to genre painters like Pieter Brueghel the Elder, and Ukrainian painters such as Nikolai Pimonenko and Vladimir Makovsky. Nature is in all its splendour at this point in the painted polyptych cycle; bright blossoms, lush greenery, and a big blue sky

1 Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008)

demonstrate the season's awe-inspiring presence.

A Game of Chess features many work strategies unfolding. Someone examines a smoking truck engine, whilst others transform tree trunk cut-offs into shingles, and others still, stack and roll away log piles. Nearly everyone is focussed on a productive task, preparing for the winter ahead. As a sun sets over a crisp sky, autumn casts a shadow into the valley. Productivity also runs throughout *Death By Water*. Most individuals are working away; there is an attempt to revitalize the melted cross-walk, and to salvage parts from the truck. Someone is framing up a house, whilst someone else is sowing seeds in a field in the distance in preparation for spring.

Both of these paintings are haunted by a past genre of themselves. In socialist realism, painters portrayed daily life in a celebratory manner propagating life under communist rule as idyllic; paintings often featured a happy and productive proletariat. Ukrainian and Russian painters such as Arkadiy Plastov and Tatiana Yablonskaya depicted farming folk hard at work and loving every minute of it. Senetchko used found imagery of Ukrainian immigrants, as well as Ukrainians working in the Carpathian Mountains as source material for some of his figures. Productivity is infused in the painting as is pastoralism, but the sentiment of joyful labour has been subsumed by a practical and pragmatic focus. The artist introduces disparity as a harbinger of reality in these works. Absent in socialist realist painting is the messiness of productivity which is amply represented within Senetchko's work. The remnants of failed attempts are multifarious: a smoking truck, a broken down fence, the fragments of a collapsed house, old parts and tools strewn about. The neat and orderly fashion of production lines is eclipsed with a chaotic bric-a-brac collection of objects and individuals working through specific tasks, often in too-close-for-comfort proximity.

There is a vibrancy of colour found in *The Fire Sermon*. The painting's blood red sunset suggests the peak of summertime, heat is felt throughout the composition. It can be found in the glowing embers of a smouldering fire and in the watery white lines of a melted cross-walk. The colour red is peppered throughout, found on a jerry-can, clothing, beer cans and a barbecue. In this work, individual appearances are at their most contemporary. Clothing design coupled with the way items are worn, serve as queues that speak to our present everyday. A tangled hierarchy presents itself in the form of understanding action and inaction within the painting. Is the fence being built, or taken apart? Are people waiting to go somewhere, or just arriving? What is going on with the scattered back lawn detritus, the result of a big party, or simply collective negligence over time? Transformation subsists in a tangled manner as well, represented in the form of the *between* states of the objects scattered throughout the composition.

In the heat of the summer, a tiredness and sense of boredom permeate. The individuals depicted in *The Fire Sermon* seem disconnected to a greater degree than any of the others in this series of paintings. Lost in solitary thought, passed out, and minimally engaged in menial chores; there is a lot of waiting and hanging around. This particular piece finds some roots

within social realism²; individuals perform mundane tasks, and apathy prevails. Excess is reflected in overindulgence with alcohol, the pile of burning timber, the melted cross-walk and carelessness with cleaning up after oneself. These signs serve as subtle indicators signalling the demise of the immediate surrounds, and also, perhaps the planet and humanity itself. Reality has seeped onto the canvas, leaving one to wonder... are boredom and apathy coping mechanisms for survival in today's world?

The Burial of the Dead is the only painting where the group of individuals appear to be working collectively towards a common goal. This is also the only painting where the entire group is uniformly clad. Dark snow suits contrast against the white snow and grey-blue sky; the suits share a resemblance to biohazard outfits, we do not see skin, faces or hair: all is covered up. Nearly everyone is facing away from the viewer. It seems just as likely that these people are on a quest to find the source of an outbreak. A pile of debris burns off on the side of the open area, the houses that once stood so tall and majestic in the background have collapsed, or been dismantled: relics of a previous civilization. One cannot say if the state of the scene occurred through human intervention, natural decay or negligence. Paralleling the clothing and individual uniformity, the landscape is unified under a blanket of snow. The cold presence of winter is ubiquitous: frozen mountains, frosted trees, icy sky, and a barren snow capped truck.

Senetchko's *Course of a Distant Empire*, series cycles through the canon of painting, merging genres, and coalescing time. Seasons and states of being act as pendulum swings, propelling eyes back and forth, over the polyptych spread. Several additional elements in this series invoke a non-linear way of reading the painting suite. These reinforce the set of strange loops that pirouette across the series, giving poly-rhythm to the work.

In all works of this series, landscape and perspective remains uniform, the mountains, stacked like bookends on either side of the sky, loom large. Line the series up in a row, side by side, and the peaks and valley of each painting form an undulating wavelength that has no endpoint or beginning. Circularity and repetition is prevalent across the suite. From the earth's seasonal rotation and the constant fluctuating state of projects to the recurring placement of circular items, such as tires, buckets, hubcaps, and logs. Beginnings and endings integrate into multiple recursive loops.

Doubling occurs frequently in this series: twin houses, twin peaks, couples sitting together, people working in pairs, the lines of a white fence next to the white lines of a crosswalk. A contrapuntal cadence further expands the series, parallel

2 It should be noted that Senetchko's work incorporates elements of both socialist realism and social realism.

Socialist Realism: patriotic in its intentions, this is a genre that glorifies socialist/communist values in the depiction of daily life of the proletariat

Social Realism: paintings that are intended to reflect the current state of working class and poor members of society - without the rose coloured glasses. An intentionally realistic and often critical portrayal of society

dimensions open as past and future are projected simultaneously.

Quite possibly the most salient strange loop within this suite is the symbolism and life-cycle of the pick-up truck. It is a haunting talisman that stays the course. In spring, the truck appears as an abandoned red husk. Its mechanical components spread across the painted foreground like excavated bones. In fall, now purple, the truck is running, but its eventual demise is foretold. In summer, the truck is depicted in two extreme states: in pristine condition, and also as a long abandoned relic where nature staged a coup on its core, flowers blossom and cascade outwards from both the engine and interior cavities. The state of the truck in winter is indiscernible; pillows of snow hide a large portion of the body. It seems likely that the snow removal is occurring so the vehicle can be used. In this series, which constantly reconfigures activities and individuals, the truck remains a constant; however, unlike the stoic and seemingly unchanging mountains, it is an entity of fluidity. It serves as an anchor in the paintings, a primordial symbol of life, death and change.

Senetchko also incorporated the truck an abstracted homage to Théodore Géricault's *Raft of Medusa*. He references Géricault's triangular composition, particularly notable in *The Fire Sermon* painting. Géricault's pyramid composition alludes to the struggle of man and nature; the figures within each triangular grouping representing either rescue and salvation, or death and tragedy. Senetchko sees the truck a both raft and lifeline, for him the characters on the truck are: "the survivors of a societal shipwreck, riding a conspicuous symbol of mobility." The pick-up thus becomes a problematic vessel of salvation. In *The Course of a Distant Empire*, salvation is not always what it seems. The pick-up's transformation loop, through which it is absorbed back into nature by way of deconstruction, decomposition and growth, emphasizes the impact and indifference between mother nature and humanity. Senetchko guides us into murky territory, salvation comes in crashing waves, with one crest threatening human annihilation, the following one promising human ingenuity. Then, yet another wave crashes down, in swirls planetary collapse, followed by an undulation of mother nature's resilience.

Senetchko's series title connects back in time to Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire*, a five-part painted series focussed on pastoralism as the ideal phase of human civilization. In his era, Cole was known to have quoted Lord Byron's *Canto IV* when promoting his series to his contemporaries. A verse from Byron's canto eloquently highlights history's own strange loop:

There is the moral of all human tales;

'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past.

First freedom and then Glory – when that fails,

Wealth, vice, corruption – barbarism at last.

And History, with all her volumes vast,

Hath but one page...

Senetchko's series is also intertwined with the words of a modern writer. T.S. Eliot wrote *Wasteland*, an abstract poem that teeters between healing transformation and grim breakdown. The titles of each painting by Senetchko correspond to the five chapter titles found within this modernist poem. Hundreds of literary, historical and British societal references form their own interconnected web of strange loops within Eliot's poem. Many have written about and attempted to decode it, line by cryptic line. With the lens of the present, Eliot's work is modernist triumph of hybridity. Sampling, references and appropriation collectively form both old and new meaning. The constant switching, transforming and reintegration of ideas, has an immediate resonance within our current world, where all forms of culture are endlessly cut up and collaged back together again.

This perpetual assemblage style of investigation is fascinating and hypnotic: it captures the attention of virtually all of society, keeping everyone fully distracted. As much as we are provided with limitless possibilities, we are also paralyzed by the power of too much choice, too many products and channels, and way too many opinions. Senetchko's expansive investigation into our contemporary condition essentially distils this cut-copy-paste schism down to a critical intimation. One best illustrated by one of the last lines found within Eliot's *Wasteland*:

These Fragments I have shored against my ruins

Senetchko's characters are practical, resourceful and resilient. But they are also wasteful and lazy; no one is perfect. Through historical tropes and visual representation, these individuals reflect a heartiness. It is this pragmatism that sustains across the series, used as a tool to combat the senselessness of life. One can see repeated attempts to decode meaning by keeping things in motion. Senetchko plays with excess, there is often detritus hanging about, but there is no real superfluity in the objects strewn from here to there. The objects are often utilitarian in nature, we primarily see industrial objects and items that could be reintegrated into other systems. Salvaging and scavenging the left-overs from previous states of existence is prevalent throughout the polyptych. A pragmatic approach that we are hard pressed to find in the *buy more, buy new, buy now* world that teems with products, platforms and patents at every corner. Just as with Eliot, Senetchko's characters are shoring found fragments against their ruins. The fragments are not lost - not forgotten - they are collected, stored and eventually reintegrated within the tangled hierarchy of this ever-unfolding strange loop.

*But we cannot do it all at once; it is a sequence. An unfolding process.
We can only control the end by making a choice at each step.*

-Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle*



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A Tale Of Two Empires: Jay Senetchko and “The Course of a Distant Empire”

Essay by Dion Kliner, 2017

Look from painting to painting: from *The Fire Sermon*, to *A Game of Chess*, to *The Burial of the Dead*, to *Death by Water*, to *What the Thunder Said*, then round again and you'll hear it. The distinct sounds of dissonant percussion banging away as Tom Waits plaintively asks, “what's he building in there.” And then, “Where in its course does this empire exist? In which direction is it moving? How does Senetchko mean that direction to be understood? Do the paintings represent a state of falling from, or building towards? Is their message a pessimistic descent into a dark age, or an optimistic recovery from catastrophe, and dawn of a bright and sustainable new future?”

Having been a frequent visitor to the Catskills, when faced with a group of paintings that include both the words “course” and “empire,” I naturally think of Thomas Cole's five-painting series, “*The Course of Empire*,” of 1834, which illustrates an amalgamation of the two metaphors generally used to embody the concept of time's passage (the arrow and the circle) through the story of a mythic empire. Time's arrow captures the uniqueness and distinctive character of sequential events, time as circle describes events as lawful, predictable, and recurrent. Cole's empire has run its course from *The Savage State*, to *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, to *The Consummation of Empire*, to *Destruction*, and finally *Desolation*. There's no new beginning for this particular empire, but the cycle of rise and fall as applied to another will begin again. This “cyclical theory of history” (the one way road from inception to decay that the theory suggests all nations are subject to) provided a guide for Cole's empire, which in turn is an indispensable guide to Senetchko's. A second guide is T.S. Eliot's 1922 masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. If you're not brushed up on your landmarks of 20th century poetry, the individual titles of “*The Course of a Distant Empire*” might not ring a bell. They are the titles of the five sections of *The Waste Land*, but reordered, says Senetchko, “to better reflect the paintings's contents.”

Cole painted the development of his empire from shifting viewpoints of a single locale in an expansive and sublime Hudson River School landscape. Senetchko has nailed his down to virtually a single point of view of a single location in a narrow valley that shows close bilateral symmetry (mountains, houses, trees, white picket fences), especially evident in *The Fire Sermon*. With its eerie orange sky and odd, disjointed activity, it's reminiscent of the inside back cover of *Mad* magazines that could be folded to create a satirical comment on the unfolded image. Even in those paintings with less bilateral symmetry, the stability and balance have been assured by being laid out in compositions that form an X, with sharp and definite vanishing points in the distant crotch of the mountains at the very center of the canvasses.

If you place the two series side by side, it's easy to imagine that *The Fire Sermon* begins in *Desolation* as it were. Not that Senetchko's characters are former residents of Cole's mythic empire, but that they are survivors after a fall: call it

catastrophe, apocalypse, or Destruction. To slyly assert the status of his characters as survivors of a traumatic event, Senetchko has matched their number to the number of survivors represented in Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (fifteen), and repeated the painting's placement of a dark skinned figure atop a compositional pyramid. To refresh the memory, the primary pyramid of *The Raft of the Medusa*, is composed of bodies (mainly of the living) built on top of a raft. They strive desperately together, their attention directed to the man at the apex who signals to a distant ship on the horizon, and what they hope is their salvation. At the lower left an older, white-haired man sits looking away dejectedly, perhaps figuring there's no hope left. In *The Fire Sermon* it's a dark skinned woman that surmounts a compositional pyramid that includes the motionless truck. No one supports her. There is no striving together towards a common goal. There is no drama. Very little interest is paid to anything by anyone including the woman at the top, who, if she could be bothered to look towards the horizon wouldn't see anything anyway. At the lower left Senetchko also places a seated, older man who might be dejected if he weren't busy napping.

Whatever brought these people to this state, by the time of *The Fire Sermon* any discernible sense of its threat or danger has vanished. There is no intimation of frustration, no particular sense of urgency to the action. Work seems to be carried out at a leisurely pace, the people secure and content enough to spend time relaxing, barbecuing, or getting drunk. From here they move forwards in their cycle by moving backwards into Cole's: Senetchko's *What the Thunder Said* meeting up with Cole's *The Arcadian or Pastoral State* as representations of idyllic states and the regeneration of nature. This is as far as "The Course of a Distant Empire" goes. However, if visible signs of advanced technologies continue to disappear, taking with them the knowledge of how they work, the next step for Senetchko's band of castaways is *The Savage State*.

The chronology of "The Course of Empire" unfolds in a way that is unified and consistent. Time moves at different rates, but in the same direction and with internal coherence. Its duration, from inception, to zenith, to ruin, progresses over the course of a day, from sunrise to sunset. The landscape changes accordingly in proportion with the expansion and contraction of human development: land is cleared; architecture is built; architecture falls down; vegetation returns. In "The Course of a Distant Empire" time progresses at differing rates simultaneously, but in a way that the logic of one negates the logic of the others. There are at least four: seasonal; human; what I'll call "material"; and geologic. Seasonal time moves logically through an entire cycle from summer to summer. Human time seems pretty well in synch in the first four paintings where no noticeable aging occurs. Then, in *What The Thunder Said*, two adults (an old man and a young woman) are gone, replaced by the appearance of two children (a boy and girl). Maybe they've always been there out of the picture, or maybe we've suddenly skipped a half dozen years into the future. Materially, decades must pass: houses collapse and are rebuilt, the truck goes from new to a rusted hulk, and the paved area the truck sits on degrades enough to support the growth of a field of poppies. Finally, look at the mountains, check their contour from painting to painting: they change. Not because of the relative position of the spectator, and not the passage of eons. The changes aren't chronologically coherent, the contours fluctuate between being sharper, hence geologically younger, and older and more worn. These inconsistencies in time are disorienting and create rents in the contiguity of the spatial and temporal fabric we think we see. The

implication is that the specifics of location, events, and character are unimportant to Senetchko. These mountains could just as well be any mountains: could just as well be substituted (along with the rest of the valley) for a prairie or an eastern deciduous forest. And this small group of individuals that look the same from painting to painting are not meant to be the same individuals. They are the idea of “society” made intimate and personal by being encapsulated. Activity looks largely haphazard and isolated. Even when in close proximity there doesn’t seem to be real contact most of the time. People keeping busy because that’s what people do: except that all the figures look as if they’ve just paused from whatever they were doing, giving each scene the perfect stillness of a museum diorama. The landscape is a backdrop in front of which stand-ins perform tableau vivant. Against the fluidity of time, Senetchko has positioned the stasis of the *mise-en-scène*.

The single example where the figures appear to be in motion and they work cohesively as a group is in the central painting, *The Burial of the Dead* (corresponding to Cole’s *The Consummation of Empire*). Here costume, tool, and activity are all coordinated and directed to a single task. Dark and hooded, the figures look like representations of Death. None of the faces are visible from within their hoods; the two we should be able to see into are empty and black. The one figure, arms crossed, leaning on its snow shovel, the one that looks to be fixing on us directly, looks particularly like an invocation of the everyman Reaper, sickle replaced by shovel.

This painting is also a good place to look at the two central images that, excluding landscape, are consistent throughout the paintings since so much else is obscured by snow: the truck and the “crosswalk.” The truck sits in the approximate center of an ellipse, like the epicenter of a blast, formed by a changing collection of characters and detritus and around which almost all activity revolves. In *The Fire Sermon* the truck looks to be in good condition and a focus of interest. Then, over the course of what looks like a year, it is slowly stripped and crumples, until by *What the Thunder Said* it’s a barely recognizable repository for flowers. As representative of advanced technology, its total loss could be troubling. Below the truck is a section of asphalt, the remains of what once was a road, or more likely a cul-de-sac. Most of the section we see is painted with white bars that suggest a crosswalk, but the lines recede too deeply, and whether it ever had utility is questionable. As it stands, it looks like a meaningless, functionless bit of artificially imposed human structure overlaying the world beneath, but to the people in the paintings it seems particularly meaningful since it’s the only area that concentrates all of their attention and activity simultaneously. The further away they move from the truck the more regular and consistent they are. Close by, the white bars appear liquid, as if they’re in a state of arrested flow, or radiating out from a center like ripples after a stone is dropped into water, or reflections in a funhouse mirror. They change from painting to painting, but they persist no matter what changes occur to the surface below: maybe because in *Death by Water* it looks like a jig is being made to refresh them. If it’s not a crosswalk, why plant the misleading suggestion of one? Arguably the most famous crosswalk, if not only in the collective Western memory, then in the world, is the one the Beatles are crossing on the cover of *Abbey Road*. As the last album to be recorded by the Beatles it signified a change in culture, and its cover supposedly contained the clues to the death of Paul. In Senetchko’s scheme, perhaps the crosswalk retains its importance to its characters as a remnant of cultural memory that is eventually lost (like the technological know-how lost with the truck) under a memorial carpet of poppies.

Of the many references to visual culture besides Gericault embedded in “The Course of a Distant Empire,” two others are most striking. Found amongst the women dressed in contemporary clothing are several that wear what look like archaic peasant costumes, including headscarf. Two are taken directly from Millet’s *Gleaners*, but shown as mirror images: the *Gleaners*’s half-bent figure on the right, is in the left middle ground of *A Game of Chess*; and the *Gleaners*’s central figure, is middle ground just right of center in *Death by Water*. Continuing the peasant theme, but in a less direct manner, are references to the paintings of Malevich. Before and after the Suprematist paintings for which he is best known, Malevich painted series of peasants (even the title of the Suprematist painting commonly known as *Red Square* was titled by Malevich as, *Painterly Realism: A Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*). Their palette is predominantly red, black, white, blue, and mustard yellow, used as flat areas of color (which he carried over into the Suprematist work). Senetchko has used the same palette in all of the clothes, and in many other objects, with very little variation in hue from one usage to the next. So, for instance, in *A Game of Chess* the same yellow that is worn by the three figures around the truck is also worn by a woman collecting twigs, and is the color of a toolbox, seat cushions, and an indicator light on the truck. The same red worn by three other figures is the same as the soles of rain boots, the brake shoes of the truck, and seen as a rectangle in the center upstairs window of the house on the right. And it’s there in the windows that Malevich’s iconic Suprematist compositions with squares and rectangles are referenced: including the *Black Square*, *Red Square*, and *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* that shows a black and red square on a white ground. From the point of view of an artist, it’s easy to understand why Senetchko would want the work of Gericault, Millet, and Malevich to be remembered. Their work is important to him, it’s where he comes from as a painter. What makes peasants significant is harder to gauge. Within the paintings they read like portents for the direction and ultimate destination for this group of fictional characters. For we the living, they could be an inducement to remember this way of life as a possible future face of a form of sustainable social organization. And for Senetchko they represent not just cultural history and social history, but personal history too. Senetchko’s heritage is Ukrainian, his forbearers farmers. Malevich, though considered a Russian artist, was born in what was the Kiev Governorate (now Ukraine) and referred to himself as Ukrainian, so he and Senetchko are landmen.

Cole’s “*Empire*” has been described as encapsulating both his pessimistic view of history, and a thinly disguised critique of Jacksonian democracy in America. Pessimistic it may be, but it’s only a cautionary tale, a dire prediction of what could happen to America. At the time, Cole and his contemporaries weren’t sure where America was in the cycle, and wondered whether American democracy and “improvement” might actually effectuate an escape. Eliot, on the other hand, felt he knew where the culture around him was: on the way to hell in a hand basket. He wrote *The Waste Land* in part as a lament about his feelings that the cultural empire around him was in the decline and fall stage of the cycle. Nevertheless, he filled it with classical references that would have been obscure at best to all but his most astute readers. In place of the dumbing down Eliot felt he was witnessing, he wanted to substitute dragging people up. His inclusion of references carries a fundamental

message, the same, I believe, as Senetchko's, "you should not forget this," or, in a slight, but importantly different formulation, "don't forget from where you come."

As a distinct and unifying metaphor every painting of "The Course of a Distant Empire" has occurrences of the ignition and extinguishing of fire: the symbol extraordinaire of human development, ingenuity, and imagination. In the end, does it stay lit or go out? The truth of the pessimism Cole put into "The Course of Empire" is that it was due in large measure to his antipathy towards the destruction that was just then beginning of the pristine landscape he loved, and the scourge of industrial development. And he was in no way averse to the idea of a return to the kind of simpler, pre-industrial world that he forecast. Could the "Distant Empire" represent a hoped for communal and agrarian emergence from our present crises? Does Senetchko, like Cole, entertain the possibility of escape into a perpetual idyll? I don't think so.

It looks like Senetchko shares Cole and Eliot's pessimism, but he's painted it without the tragedy and drama of epic. Senetchko's empire doesn't so much rise and fall, as amble aimlessly along in a land where Newton's Third Law (For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction) descends to slapstick: a perfect example in *The Fire Sermon*, where two men push the truck in opposite directions unaware of what the other is doing. He's represented his concerns for the loss of knowledge and culture, and the future of human action, interaction, and organization as a Beckettian state where willingness and pointlessness cancel one another out in apathy. In *What the Thunder Said*, the vanishing point shifts for the first time from above the distant mountains to whatever is in front of them at their base, and there is an indication of a flattened horizon that divides the painting in half: from the white picket fence on the left, across the roof of the truck, to the shape of the clump of trees, almost where the red of the poppies become indistinct. It gives compositional form to an expression of lowered expectations, and the giant X of the compositions can be seen as a giant and cautionary, "Please, not this. There's no kinda Gericault or Eliot gonna show up on this horizon."

JAY SENETCHKO :: GENERAL STATEMENT

Jay Senetchko is a storyteller. He is most easily defined as a painter, although he situates his practice in a broader material context and process, which includes photography, digital media, sculptures, performance and installations. His spectacle-based exhibitions are an effort to insert fine art back into the social fabric by engaging the public at large, not only the academic and invested.

In Senetchko's primary medium of oil on canvas he operates as a figurative realist creating narrative-based paintings. His subject matter, featuring elements of his personal history, contemporary life, and historical references exposes him as an artist with a nostalgic and romantic temperament. However, it is his intention through the use of these vehicles to reveal the tension he perceives within sentimentality and the inherent dangers of nostalgia.

JAY SENETCHKO :: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, Jay Senetchko now lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia.

He is a University of Alberta graduate (1997 - *Bachelor of Commerce with Distinction*) and spent several years as a professional soccer player in Edmonton and Montreal before pursuing entrepreneurial interests in Canada and the United States. In 2000 he moved to Vancouver and received a *Diploma of Classical Animation* from the Vancouver Film School in 2001.

Primarily self-taught, his painting has been strongly influenced by apprenticeships with both Gideon Flitt and Odd Nerdrum. His work has exhibited since 2002 and shown in North and Central America and Europe (www.senetchko.ca).

Recent awards and events of interest include an *honourable mention* in the 2013 *Kingston Portrait Competition*, shortlist for the *BP Portrait Competition* (2011, 2012, 2015), shortlist for the *Kurt Beers 100 Painters of Tomorrow* publication (2013), shortlist for the *Royal Academy Summer Exhibition* (2015), inclusion in the recently published *The Nerdrum School* (a collection of paintings by those who have apprenticed with the Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum - 2013), and *1st place* in the juried 2012 *Painting on the Edge* competition sponsored by the *Canadian Federation of Artists*.

He is the author of *Making Pictures Speak: Composition for the Visual Arts*, a textbook on perspective and composition for visual art; as well as the adult storybook *Fishes and Wishes*. He is currently developing another storybook, *The Dragon and the Unicorn: An Ideological Fairytale*.

He has been teaching life-drawing, perspective, composition, colour theory and art history at *Vancouver Film School* since 2002, and teaching painting privately since 2003. He recently finished creating and filming an online instructional video for *Craftsy* (www.craftsy.com) entitled *Paint and Palette Essentials: A Beginner's Guide to Oil Painting*. He currently holds independent lectures on the arts in alternating locations throughout Vancouver.

Senetchko is also a founding member (2010) of the Vancouver-based figurative collective *Phantoms in the Front Yard* (www.phantomsinthefrontyard.com).

JAY SENETCHKO :: CURRICULUM VITAE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2017 *The Course of a Distant Empire*, Winsor Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2016 *The Best of Life (A Selection)*, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH, USA
- 2015 *The Best of Life*, Burrard Arts Foundation, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2013 *Industry and the Sleepwatchers*, Site-specific Installation, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2011 *Systems*, Ian Tan Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2011 *Apologia*, Pera Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2011 *Still*, Jacana Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2006 *New Work*, The Front Gallery, Edmonton, AB, Canada
- 2006 *Drawing from Beneath the Surface*, Elliot Louis Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2003 *Wettenschauung*, Gallery 83, Vancouver, BC, Canada

PHANTOMS IN THE FRONT YARD FIGURATIVE COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS:

- 2017 *Bad People (Portraits of the Punished)*, Hot Art Wet City Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2016 *Space*, Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2015 *Over the Counter Culture*, Gordon Smith Gallery of Canadian Art, North Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2015 *Unreliable Narrator*, East Vancouver Cultural Center, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2014 *Public Dreams Private Myths*, Meccanica Exhibition Space, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2014 *Everyone I've Never Known*, The Burrard Hotel, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2014 *Phantoms*, Leigh Community Center, Port Coquitlam, BC, Canada
- 2013 *Shed*, Pendulum Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2013 *Bloodlines*, Waterfall Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2012 *In Other Words*, Hot Art Wet City Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2012 *M(ise)*, Gallery Fukai, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2011 *On Great Men*, Beatty St. Pop-up Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2011 *Uniform*, Pera Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2018 *Luminescence III*, Deer Lake Gallery, Burnaby, BC, Canada (*juried*)
- 2017 *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada (*juried*)
- 2017 *Westcoast Figurative*, Gibsons Public Art Gallery, Gibsons, BC, Canada
- 2016 *Found*, Goldmoss Satellite, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2016 *Into the Wild*, Goldmoss Satellite, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2015 *Corvus and Wolf*, Goldmoss Satellite, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2015 *The Kingston Prize*, La Galerie d'Art Desjardins, Drummondville, ON, Canada (*juried*)
- 2015 *The Kingston Prize*, Beaverbrook Gallery, Fredericton, NB, Canada (*juried*)

2015 *The Kingston Prize*, Firehall Theater, Gananoque, QC, Canada (*juried*)
 2015 *Salt Spring National Art Prize (juried)*, Mahon Hall, Salt Spring Island, BC, Canada
 2015 *Concurrent*, Winsor Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2015 *Summer Mix*, Kimoto Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2014 *Summer Mix*, Kimoto Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2014 *Thru the Trap Door*, On Main Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2014 *Aerial*, Goldmoss Gallery, Roberts Creek, BC, Canada
 2013 *The Kingston Prize*, Art Gallery of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada (*juried*)
 2013 *The Kingston Prize*, Firehall Theater, Gananoque, QC, Canada (*juried*)
 2013 *Anonymous Drawings*, Galerie Nord/Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin, Germany (*juried*)
 2013 *Anonymous Drawings*, Galerie Delikatessenhaus, Leipzig, Germany (*juried*)
 2013 *Anonymous Drawings*, TAC Eindhoven, Eindhoven, Netherlands (*juried*)
 2012 *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada (*juried*)
 2012 *Summer Show*, Blackheath Gallery, London, UK
 2012 *GZ-ArtBasel*, Saalbau Rhypark am Rhein, Basel, Switzerland (*juried*)
 2012 *The Kingston Prize*, La Galerie d'Art Desjardins, Drummondville, ON, Canada (*juried*)
 2011 *The Kingston Prize*, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, ON, Canada (*juried*)
 2011 *Group Show*, Axis Contemporary Art, Calgary, AB, Canada
 2011 *Figuratively Speaking*, Blackheath Gallery, London, UK
 2011 *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada (*juried*)
 2010 *Mirror Mirror*, Gallery Atsui, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2010 *The Drawing Room*, Pendulum Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2009 *10 x 10*, Gallery Atsui, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2008 *Kitsch Biennale*, Pasinger Fabrik, Munich, Germany (*juried*)
 2007 *Grand*, The Weiss Gallery, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
 2007 *The Kingston Prize*, Kingston, ON, Canada (*juried*)
 2007 *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada (*juried*)
 2006 *Perspectives*, Elliot Louis Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2006 *Figurative Show*, Front Gallery, Edmonton, AB, Canada
 2003 *Sensualite*, Bfly Atelier, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2002 *Neo-indifference* with Gideon Flitt, Bfly Atelier, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2002 *SWARM*, Gallery 83, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2002 *Something Happened*, Gallery 83, Vancouver, BC, Canada

AWARDS:

2018 *Manifest Grand Jury Finalist for Season 13*, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH, USA
 2017 *4th Place - Landscape with Life*, American Art Awards, <http://www.americanartawards.com/>
 2013 *Honourable mention*, *The Kingston Prize*, Art Gallery of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada
 2012 *1st place award*, *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2011 *2nd place award*, *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2007 *2nd place award*, *Painting on the Edge*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada

DONATIONS:

2017	<i>Pivots and Spins</i> , Access Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2017	<i>Splash</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2016	<i>Splash</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2012	<i>Art for Life</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2011	<i>Art for Life</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2011	<i>Unite with Art</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2010	<i>Art for Life</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2010	<i>Unite with Art</i> , Vancouver, BC, Canada
2007	<i>The Middle</i> , private exhibition for BC Cancer, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2006	<i>Odd Pieces</i> , private exhibition for BC Cancer, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2005	<i>Move</i> , private exhibition for BC Cancer, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2004	<i>Shift</i> , private exhibition for BC Cancer, Vancouver, BC, Canada

EDUCATION:

2006	Odd Nerdrum apprenticeship
2000-03	Gideon Flitt apprenticeship
2001	Vancouver Film School, Diploma of Classical Animation
1997	Bachelor of Commerce with Distinction, University of Alberta

WRITING:

2018	<i>Sunshine in a Cloudy Age</i> , Exhibition Text, Sunshine Frere at Seymour Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2015	<i>Eagle Versus Seagull</i> , Essay.
2015	<i>Art Isn't that Important</i> , Essay.
2014	<i>Dangerous Individuals</i> , Essay.
2010	<i>Originality is Boring</i> , Essay.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE, PANELS:

2017	<i>Speaker</i> , THRIVE, Winsor Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2017	<i>Speaker</i> , Artist Talk: The Course of a Distant Empire, Winsor Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2015	<i>Speaker</i> , Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver, Burrard Arts Foundation, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2015	<i>Panelist</i> , Concurrent Panel Discussion, Winsor Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2015	<i>Juror</i> , Opus Art Supplies Outdoor Painting Competition, Vancouver, BC, Canada
2015	<i>Instructor</i> , Craftsy Online Education - Colours in Bloom, Denver, CO, USA
2014	<i>Instructor</i> , Craftsy Online Education - Paint and Palette Essentials, Denver, CO, USA
2010	<i>Juror</i> , Arts, Canadian Federation of Artists, Vancouver, BC, Canada

2014-present *Colour Theory instructor*, Vancouver Film School, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2002-present *Composition instructor*, Vancouver Film School, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2002-present *Art History instructor*, Vancouver Film School, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2001-present *Life Drawing instructor*, Vancouver Film School, Vancouver, BC, Canada
 2001-present *Perspective instructor*, Vancouver Film School, Vancouver, BC, Canada

PRESS:

2018, March 16. MacLellan, Julie. *Storyteller Ponders Life's Questions*. Burnaby Now, Burnaby, BC.
 2018, March 12. MacLellan, Julie. *Luminescence III: Meet the Artists - Jay Senetchko*. Burnaby Now, Burnaby, BC. <http://www.burnabynow.com/entertainment/luminescence-iii-meet-the-artists-jay-senetchko-1.23199123>
 2018, March 12. MacLellan, Julie. *Luminescence III Set to Light up the Night at Deer Lake Gallery*. Burnaby Now, Burnaby, BC. <http://www.burnabynow.com/entertainment/luminescence-iii-set-to-light-up-the-night-at-deer-lake-gallery-1.23199104>
 2018, January 11. Staff. "The Course of a Distant Empire", by Artist Jay Senetchko. Booooooom. <https://www.booooooom.com/2018/01/11/the-course-of-a-distant-empire-by-artist-jay-senetchko/>
 2017, November 17. Connor, Shawn. *Darkness, Light and Colour*. Westcoast Homes and Design, Vancouver, BC. <http://www.homesanddesign.ca/art-scene-winters-art-exhibits-reflect-the-vastness-of-human-experience/>
 2017, November 22. Sproule, Michelle. The Scout List, Volume 448, Scout Magazine. <http://scoutmagazine.ca/2017/11/22/the-scout-list-vol-448/>
 2017, October 23. Bierdz, Thomas. *Best American Galleries Name World's Best "Landscapes With Life": Tun, McCartin, Shuai, Senetchko and Benveniste*. Huffington Post. <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/59eeb1d9e4b0b8a51417bce6>
 2017, September. Goldstein, Laura. *A Cathedral of Art*. Westcoast Homes and Design, Vancouver, BC. <http://www.homesanddesign.ca/design/a-cathedral-of-art/>
 2017, March 5. Staff. *Offbeat Vancouver Gallery Hot Art Wet City Closing at End of Month*. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/hot-art-wet-city-1.4010067>
 2017, February 2. Baker, Rafferty. *Whither Now Main Street? Vancouver's Changing Mount Pleasant*. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/main-street-tech-corridor-rising-costs-1.3962844>
 2016, August 23. Hormans, David. *See how the Vancouver Mural Festival has transformed the city*. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/see-how-the-vancouver-mural-festival-has-transformed-the-city-1.3732757>
 2016, August 8. Sanders, Rachel. *Young Artists Switch the Script on Public Art in Vancouver*. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/young-artists-switch-the-script-on-public-art-in-vancouver-1.3712228>
 2016, May 4. Staff. *Artist Spotlight: Jay Senetchko*. Booooooom. <http://www.booooooom.com/2016/05/04/artist-spotlight-jay-senetchko/>
 2013, September 26. Testado, Justine. *Artist Jay Senetchko Builds Full-Scale Farmhouse as an Extension of His Paintings*, Archinect. <http://archinect.com/news/article/82774294/artist-jay-senetchko-builds-full-scale-farmhouse-as-an-extension-of-his-paintings-show-opens-tomorrow-in-vancouver>
 2013, September 6. Morrison, Andrew. *Honour Bound - Artist Jay Senetchko's Upcoming Installation to Benefit Sole Food*, Scout Magazine. <http://scoutmagazine.ca/2013/09/06/honour-bound-artist-jay-senetchkos-upcoming-installation-to-benefit-sole-food/>
 2011, April/May. Johnson, Mia. *Jay Senetchko: Systems*, Preview Magazine, Vancouver, BC.
 2006, May 16. Bouchard, Gilbert. *For Senetchko Thinking Outside the Box Makes Perfect Sense*, The Edmonton Journal, Edmonton, AB.

PUBLICATIONS:

2018, March. *Supernatural, episode 1319 - LaVeau Gallery*. Warner Brothers Television, Burnaby, BC.
 2017, December 27. Kliner, Dion. *Jay Senetchko: A Tale of Two Empires, Two Coats of Paint*. <http://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2017/12/distant-empire.html>
 2017, November/December. Frere, Sunshine. *Tangled Hierarchies*, Artists on Art Online. <http://www.artists-on-art.com/magazine/26novdec17/>
 2017, October. *Supernatural, episode 1308 - Cambridge Museum*. Warner Brothers Television, Burnaby, BC.

2017, June. Frere, Sunshine. *Tangled Hierarchies*, Vancouver.

2014, December. Wong, Paul; Erickson, Rick. *Through the Trap Door*, Vancouver.

2014, February. Kang, Yachu. *The Sparkle of Art*, Artist Magazine, Taiwan.

2013, November. Scott, Richard; Lundgren, Per. *The Nerdrum School: The Master and his Students*, Orfeus Publishing, Norway.

2011, September. Senetchko, Jay; Kliner, Dion. *Jay Senetchko: 2006-2010*. Classic Printing, Vancouver

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