
iNVENTX Creative Exhibition

SUSTAINAISSANCE IN PRACTICE: Quiet Materials, Loud Meaning

After the Leaves

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Abstract

This artwork investigates the evolving relationship between humanity, nature, and the conditions of modernity. Positioned within a post-natural framework, the work explores how contemporary social change and urban development reshape, yet fail to sever, the fundamental connection between human beings and the natural world. Utilizing acrylic on canvas with minimal colour application, the composition foregrounds expressive gesture and symbolic form to reflect a landscape in transition, one where organic elements and modern visual sensibilities coexist in a state of tension and harmony. Conceptually influenced by postmodern artists such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, the piece engages with visual strategies that merge modernist ideals with social reflection. Ultimately, the work presents a visual narrative of balance and continuity, offering a contemplative space in which the viewer can consider the persistence of ecological consciousness within an increasingly modernised world.

Keywords: Human–nature relationship; Post-natural landscape; Modernity; Abstraction; Ecological memory

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Artist Statement

After the Leaves explores the quiet aftermath of nature's disappearance, a still and suspended world where the organic has faded and only traces remain. In this work, I reflect on a post-natural landscape, where the presence of leaves is no longer physical but symbolic, reconstructed through memory, abstraction, and restraint. The absence of direct natural forms becomes a way of addressing loss, erosion, and the fragile persistence of ecological memory.

Executed in acrylic on canvas, the composition employs a minimal colour palette to evoke silence, distance, and the fading pulse of seasonal cycles. The restrained use of colour and gesture is intended to create a sense of emptiness and pause, allowing the viewer to experience the work as a space of reflection rather than representation. The muted tones emphasise absence rather than presence, suggesting a landscape that exists more as a psychological and emotional condition than a physical environment.

This piece is both an elegy and an inquiry into how we remember and reinterpret the natural world in an era where its continuity is increasingly uncertain, particularly through symbolic and affective forms of visual expression (Langer, 1957). It questions how memory, imagination, and abstraction can act as substitutes for what is no longer directly accessible, and how painting itself becomes a means of preserving a sense of connection to a disappearing natural reality.

Concept and Theme

This work critically examines the evolving relationship between the human figure and the landscape within the context of contemporary modernity and social transformation. While rapid urbanisation and changing patterns of living have significantly altered the ways in which individuals perceive and engage with their surroundings, the intrinsic connection between humanity and nature remains resilient and unresolved.

The composition explores this enduring relationship, suggesting that despite external shifts in environment and culture, an underlying interdependence persists between the natural world and human existence. Rather than presenting nature as a purely external or idealised entity, the work positions it as something increasingly mediated through memory, absence, and abstraction.

At a conceptual level, the work emphasises the importance of equilibrium, a dynamic balance in which human presence and ecological awareness must coexist. The tension between loss and continuity becomes central to the visual narrative, reflecting broader concerns about sustainability,

cultural memory, and the fragile conditions of the contemporary human experience within a post-natural landscape.

Materials and Techniques

After the Leaves is an acrylic on canvas work that explores expressive gesture and emotional contrast. The bold and dynamic brushstrokes are applied with deliberate restraint, using a minimal colour palette to evoke a sense of silence and tension. The dominant contrast of white and red creates a visual and emotional intensity, with red asserting itself as a bold presence against the void-like calm of white. At the centre, a portrait anchors the composition with a strong visual statement, functioning as a symbolic human presence within an abstracted and fragmented landscape.

The use of acrylic allows for rapid layering and controlled spontaneity, enabling the artist to balance immediacy with reflection in the painting process. Gestural marks are not intended to describe physical forms realistically, but to suggest emotional states and psychological atmospheres. The surface of the canvas becomes a site of negotiation between control and release, where brushstrokes operate as traces of movement, memory, and sensation. Through this process, material choices and painterly techniques are used not merely for visual effect, but as conceptual tools to communicate absence, tension, and the instability of the post-natural condition.



Figure 1. *After the Leaves*

Artistic and Design Influences

This work is informed by a sustained engagement with modern visual aesthetics and their relationship to natural forms, reflecting an ongoing dialogue between contemporary culture and the organic world. Rather than adopting a literal or representational approach, the work draws on abstraction and symbolic imagery to negotiate the tension between constructed environments and natural memory. The visual language operates within a hybrid sensibility, where fragments of recognisable forms coexist with gestural marks and ambiguous spaces, suggesting a landscape that is simultaneously artificial and organic, familiar and estranged.

The approach is notably influenced by postmodern artistic practices that challenge the boundaries between modernist form, cultural critique, and personal expression. In particular, the work draws conceptual parallels to the visual strategies of artists such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, whose practices often interrogated the impact of modern culture on human perception and identity. While their work frequently engaged with imagery drawn from mass media, technology, and consumer culture, this influence is translated here through a more introspective and painterly lens. Instead of direct appropriation or collage, the influence emerges through compositional structure, layered symbolism, and an emphasis on visual ambiguity.

More broadly, the work aligns with traditions of expressive and conceptual painting that privilege emotional resonance over formal representation. The artist's influences extend beyond specific figures to include wider currents in postmodern and contemporary art, where painting functions as a site for reflection, critique, and affective experience. In this context, *After the Leaves* situates itself within a lineage of artists who use abstraction and minimalism not as stylistic ends, but as methods for engaging with cultural memory and contemporary visual culture (Walther, 2000).

Conclusion

The work articulates a complex and reflective relationship between humanity, nature, and modernity, emphasising an enduring bond that persists despite ongoing social and environmental transformation. Rather than presenting a fixed or resolved position, the artwork foregrounds uncertainty as a central condition of the contemporary human experience, where nature is no longer encountered directly, but through memory, absence, and symbolic representation.

Through its restrained visual language and minimal aesthetic, the work invites viewers to slow down and reconsider their own relationship with the natural world. The absence of literal imagery becomes a critical gesture, encouraging reflection on what has been lost, what remains, and what

continues to be imagined. In this sense, the painting functions not only as an expressive object, but as a contemplative space in which personal and collective ecological concerns intersect.

Ultimately, the work suggests that the dialogue between human presence and the natural environment remains unresolved and fragile. Within a rapidly modernising world, where ecological systems are increasingly threatened and displaced, After the Leaves positions painting as a quiet but necessary act of remembrance, questioning, and emotional engagement with the conditions of contemporary existence.

References

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Authors' Bio

Hanafiah Waiman is a Malaysian visual artist whose practice focuses on social critique and contemporary environmental concerns. His work investigates the relationship between society and the surrounding environment, often addressing moral, political, and cultural conditions through expressive painting. In recent years, his practice has expanded to include digital painting as an alternative medium for exploring new visual approaches and modes of representation.