

JUDITH SPIEGEL

"SLOUGH CYCLE: A NATURAL HISTORY"

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Our initial response to a landscape is similar to those 19th century tourists who used a portable frame to view the picturesque. One walks, stops, chooses an exquisite moment -- a stand of trees, a scenic vista -- and moves on. The contemporary analogy to the portable frame is the camera. It is as if one cannot see what's there without first taking a picture. The natural landscape is on the verge of disappearing. Raw nature will become as carefully tended as an English garden.

"Slough Cycle" is a re-creation of a personal sanctuary found in the wildlife preserve of the San Elijo Slough. Judith Spiegel has made visual equivalents for the active viewing of a particular site. Her immediate experience is filtered through the nostalgia evoked by old photographs and the paintings of John Constable and Thomas Cole. As much as "Slough Cycle" is about the pleasure and beauty of a particular place, it is also about the way art history influences the act of seeing. Images in different styles butt up against each other while sharing the overlying subject/narrative. It is the narrative rather than the style that holds the work together.

Spiegel comments on the question of addressing the landscape genre in a period of pending eco-disaster: "My statement on ecology is latent rather than overt. I have always gone to a natural setting as a form of meditation. "Slough Cycle" is about the importance of landscape as a safe place. People now think of nature as a haven from the social world when three hundred years ago they thought of the forest as the devil's own."

"A friend brought me to the slough as part of a perfect day's play. It was as if she gave me a wonderful gift. I in turn brought a friend with me on one of the occasions I returned to take more photographs. The piece came about in my desire to bring this sanctuary into my studio which is a rather horrible place. It is also very much a present to myself and the people I shared it with."

"Originally the luncheon was a ploy to relax my friends in front of the camera. Few people like being photographed. Lunch is also a neglected institution in