MATTHEW WONG

By Will Heinrich

“The Realm of Appearances,” in which a red meadow rises up to a high horizon line and impasto moon, is a densely set typology of brush strokes: Thick navy wiggles collide with a rain of overlapping oil-green drops and a school of pert yellow dabs. “The Road” is centered on a wavy blue line that might be a tree trunk, a road or just a line, and the speckled white birches in his Klimt homage “The Kingdom” become an Op Art swath of stripes in the canvas’s upper third.

At first I thought these complicated constructs of color and pattern were spoiled by the single tiny person Mr. Wong drops into most of them. The figures’ rough, rudimentary drawing upsets the intoxicating ambiguity of the larger shapes like a false coin, and their drastic difference in scale makes them hard to focus on.

But in fact they’re both psychologically and formally crucial. It’s only the little gray man at a wishing well who turns “The Realm of Appearances” from an exotic but contained garden into the endless expense of the unconscious. And it’s only the sketchy gray man padding a canoe across “The Beginning” who, by keeping the painting anchored however tenuously in figuration, gives its psychedelically punctilious the power to shock.

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