

## WHAT TO SEE IN NEW YORK ART GALLERIES THIS WEEK

by Will Heinrich



Matthew Wong, *The Realm of Appearances*, 2018, oil on canvas, 65 × 80

The young Canadian painter Matthew Wong has an illustrator's vivid sense of color and an obsessiveness he seems to have domesticated into a resource. In the group of conventionally structured but graphic and gloriously weird oil landscapes that, along with a series of less successful small watercolors, comprise his solo debut at Karma, he leans heavily into painterly abstraction.

*The Realm of Appearances*, in which a red meadow rides 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 swathe 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 note, 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 expanse of the unconscious. And it's only the sketchy gray man paddling a canoe across *The Beginning* who, by keeping the painting anchored however tenuously in figuration, gives its psychedelic pointillism the power to shock.