

TIME OUT
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VERNE DAWSON, “TINNITUS”

by Howard Halle

Trailer park meets Arcadia in Verne Dawson’s latest paintings, which, as usual, feature prelapsarian scenes of folks unburdened by the cares of the world as they go about their business amid a lush verdancy. Also as usual, the images are rendered in a manner pitched between faux-naïve and visionary. Other subjects are depicted as well, including portraits and one composition of a woman enraptured by an abstract painting in a gallery. But mainly, the works flow from the artist’s Edenic sensibility.

The settings of the many of them, however, seem less utopian and more rooted in the present—or more accurately, a history-haunted terrain like that of the American South, a landscape with which the Alabama native is no doubt familiar. If so, Dawson appears to be both acknowledging and pushing back against a quality of memory indigenous to a region where, as William Faulkner once put it, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

In several of the canvases, trailers—those signifiers of downscale rural life—stand at or near the horizon line like way stations between the terrestrial and the celestial. Those realms continually slip one into the another, especially in an image of a tiny jetliner zipping across a heavenly backdrop of planetary orbs and stellar novas. In another scene, an eye-shaped wormhole in the sky teems with tiny figures that are seemingly being born into another dimension as in *The Leftovers*. The weight of the past, it would seem, is escapable after all, but only by taking the supernatural path.