

ANDY NEWMAN'S HOUSES ARE BOTH DESOLATE AND POPULATED

Living in Maine, we are familiar with the curious blend of isolation and security that our homes can evoke. At this time of year, the cold and darkness descend upon us and the snow and ice keep us homebound. Yet the holidays are on the horizon. Our homes become both warm havens and cold, drafty prisons, the site of holiday parties and lonesome meditation. This is our contrasting sense of home – a place of both loneliness and celebration.

So it makes it a fitting time of year to open an art show portraying this oddly comfortable paradox. Andy Newman's new show at the Hay Gallery is an homage to this sensibility. Although he is not a Maine native, Newman's exhibit entitled «Inland» is concerned with houses in often empty or abstracted landscapes. All share a sense of emptiness and a vast potential for togetherness.

The visual vocabulary of Newman's work complements his content. Large farmhouses are rendered in bright, almost pastel colors, but remain uninhabited and distant, like childhood memories of the homestead. Closer, more intimate renditions of capes are suffused with red and orange, suggesting the rising or setting of the sun. The residents have just gone to bed, or are just about to rise. All of the artist's work has a heavily textured, layered feel, hinting at generations come and gone, each leaving a strata of stories behind. But perhaps like the pages of each subject's history, these paintings look like they have been forgotten and left in the rain. Their colors run together, their lines seem blurred. It is as if the rain has removed the polished exterior and left us with a rough-hewn architectural frame, a chunky, colourful skeleton.

It is impossible to avoid references to Andrew Wyeth, particularly in Newman's choice of framing and content. But Newman is not imitating Wyeth, rather he is riffing on the theme of the homestead in New England, and his view is unique and well executed. The voice of these paintings is clear and sound. They are all houses with dark windows, yet they remain concerned with the potential for human habitation. His work is populated with beautifully lonely places that tell long stories with their silence.

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By Allen Baldwin