



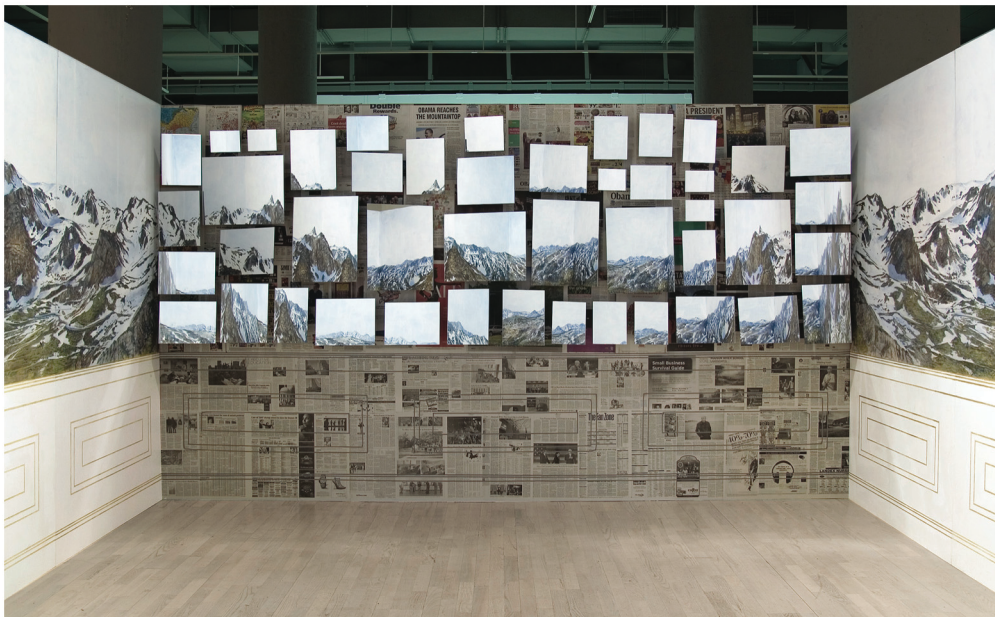
March, 2022

**Museum der Moderne**  
Salzburg, Austria

Oct 23, 2021-Feb 20, 2022

**Ellen Harvey The Disappointed Tourist**

**By LUISA CALDWELL**



*Room of Sublime Wallpaper (I), Ellen Harvey, 2008. Photography: Locks Gallery.*

Landscape, landscape painting, seascapes, vistas and panoramas, architecture, history of art and architecture, classicism, ornamentation and decoration, mirrors and reflections, loss and longing, nostalgia, failure, tourism, selfies, self-portraiture, maps, climate change, public interventions, and installation are some of the many interwoven themes and approaches that lace in and out of Ellen Harvey's work. Her mid career retrospective at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, Austria is a tour de force of over 20 mostly large scale installations and architecturally structured environments all stemming from concise concepts. Thoughtfully curated by Museum der Moderne's Tina Teufel, a fluid placement of artworks allowed for connection and contemplation.

Some highlights included *The Room of Sublime Wallpaper (I)* from 2008. In a room made of theater flats, on the main wall covered in newspaper above a simplified wainscoting, are irregularly angled mirrors of various sizes, squares and rectangles. These mirrors reflect a lovely panoramic mountain scene similar to the topography of Salzburg in the Austrian Alps. Or that is how it is experienced before entering. Upon entering, it both confounds and delights like a fun house of mirrors where one can't get the perfect reflection, but at times getting three or four different views like a selfie burst or even reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *5-Way Self Portrait* 1917. More seriously the work is about human presence in nature, or how viewers are "the inevitable final context of any artwork," including who gets fancy hand painted wallpaper and who gets newspaper.

*Museum of Failure*, 2007-08, comprises two parallel walls, the far wall painted in a tromp l'oeil depiction of gilt framed mirrors hanging in salon style (think Johann Zoffany *Tribuna degli Uffizi* from which this work was partly inspired). Within these faux frames there are mis-photographed self-portraits of the artist in her studio, all realistically painted. But what we see is a lot of shots of tripod stands, studio environs and one hotspot where the artists face may be. The exterior wall facing out depicts the same frames only in an etching on mirror technique, empty in the center except for one cut out to view the other wall. The line work is exquisite and ornamentation rich, but speaks of a certain elusiveness in art's attempt to capture life. The piece hardly fails regardless of how much failure is portrayed.

*The Mermaid: Two Incompatible Systems Intimately Linked* from 2020 is a powerful monumental painting on aluminum panels running 100ft long by 10ft tall. The Mermaid shows a section of South Florida, from Everglades to Miami. Rendered in only black and white, this stark representation of where the natural wild world meets human civilization and development is an instructional teaching visual on the idea of encroachment. Scale matters here because the scale dynamically enhances understanding of the distinct duel systems.

While development is undoubtedly harmful to the natural world, a new resilient adaptiveness is being seen through pushback by fauna into cities and suburbs. This side by side life is becoming less defined, with more grey areas all the time.

The eponymous ongoing series The Disappointed Tourist currently consists of 250 paintings, monochrome with subtle color flourishes, of non extant “tourist” sites around the world. Harvey crowd sourced sites that people wished they could visit but no longer exist.\* These postcard like renderings include the humble to the majestic: ancient mythical ruins (Atlantis; Hanging Gardens of Babylon), to lost civilizations (Troy 1180BC; Great Wall of Benin) to famous cafes (Old Cafe Winkler, Salzburg; Florent NYC), to roadside attractions, video stores and theme parks, to synagogues, mosques and churches. And even to more conceptual selections, one senses, are heartfelt, creating empathy from the viewer as well as excitement when encountering a familiar site. The Disappointed Tourist exploits the sentiment of nostalgia and a longing for what no longer exists. Nostalgia in art is always to be approached warily, but in this engaging piece it is less nostalgia that comes forward than a sense of unification. The word nostalgia as derived from the Greek means “a longing to return home”. Faced with current world events, from the isolation of covid to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, with families fleeing their homes in both countries, there is a poignancy to this piece that goes beyond nostalgia. What more will be lost in the near future? There are worse things than a longing to return home. **WM**

\* Submission suggestions for The Disappointed Tourist can be made at

<https://www.disappointedtourist.org/submit-a-site>



**LUISA CALDWELL**

Luisa Caldwell is an artist working and living between NYC and Italy. Known for large scale public art works, with recent installations at Hancher Auditorium at University of Iowa using 17,000 found and collected candy wrappers. Permanent projects include commissions from NYC Percent for Art and NYC MTA Art& Design. Autumn of 2019 Caldwell has residencies through CEC Back Apartment Residency in St. Petersburg, Russia and Guild

House at Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY.