

ANAT EBGI

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Neil Raitt

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It's amazing how much effort, skill and intellect Neil Raitt directs towards donning the ornate trappings of kitsch. Visitors enter his installation through a painstakingly contrived threshold whose tree-shaped outline resembles that of a rearview mirror air freshener. Inspired by lowbrow landscapes and themed hotel decor, the immersing atmosphere within is suffused with affectations of tackiness. Minute detail animates a world that defies logic but somehow subsumes you. Blue-carpeted floors are punctuated by phony rocks and benches upholstered with monotonous landscape patterns. Steam-emitting lighted fountains supply auditory ambience. One slatted wall appears to belong at a thrift store. Another wall sports a striking mural depicting bosky mountains whose impossible optical-illusion superimpositions recall M.C. Escher. This backdrops canvases eliciting the superficial sensation that Bob Ross might return any minute to paint the finishing touches on his happy little trees. But Raitt's clever juxtapositions and wallpaper-like repetition betray headier intentions. In recycling popular landscape depictions, he questions our culture's standard modes of co-opting nature for the purposes of pure artifice. Can kitsch possibly approach sublimity? Do exalted landscapes outstrip our stereotypical views of them? Suspended between elegance and tawdriness, the completely immersing, uncanny environment of this tableau offers no answers but transcends its tinsel origins to almost awe-inspiring effect.