

In ancient times, Etruscan priests read the future in the clouds by observing them from high places. However close they got, it would never be as close, never as intimate, as Craig Peyton whose cloudscape works we see here. Peyton has been flying for upwards of half a century in various personal propeller planes, hour upon hour, day after day. By his reckoning he has lived in that neighborhood of the empyrean solidly for virtually a year nonstop. Every image he shot was done from one airplane, his Mooney M-20J which he calls his 'ecto-skeleton'. What we see in the show is a chronicle on multiple levels. At the most basic level, we are witnessing the advancing technology of aerial video and photography over time. And, from moment to moment, the evanescent impenetrably mysterious changeability of clouds - however closely we abide among them, they remain the other. As such we are witnessing also a chronicle of Peyton's own inscape, his frame-choice reaction to this most enticing subject-matter, a sort of elemental counterpart to the nude with the infinite interpretations and projections of mood, light and yearning it demands of us.

As the story goes, Peyton was a successful participant in the wild New York music scene of the 1980s. His band Latitude had produced a number 1 album. It was the decade that spawned music videos, launched the transformative MTV/VH1 channel on cable, and the idea that every song needed the accompaniment of a visual narrative. Already flying recreationally by then, Peyton chose to film – yes film - the sky as content for his band's VH1 videos. His work was spotted by sharp corporate eyes who began to pay him for just such footage to use in corporate, commercial and marketing videos. He had stumbled rather accidentally into a second, more stable and enduring career. From 16mm and 35mm film through the decades to the present-day 360 degree digital cameras, from switching between video to still cameras to catch a static moment, from handheld to wing-attached to early drones, Peyton stayed at the forefront of the technology evolution and his profession. Ultimately, he shot aerial footage for Hollywood movies. Which is to say, he remained always and minutely a master of his medium, as much a master as, say Constable or Magritte – both famous devotees of clouds - are of their pigments and palettes.

The difference, of course, is that Peyton's sensibility is informed as much by music as art. It's hard to say which comes first for him. He grew up surrounded by the trappings of the latter, his parents being art teachers at the private school at Wooster in Connecticut. His eye received more systematic extended tutoring than his ear. Yet he *chose* music as his metier, perhaps as an escape. Hold on to that concept of escape: a leitmotif beckons. At any rate, we can be forgiven for seeking a confluence of the two, art and music, in his cloud works. There's a celebrated dictum, that architecture is frozen music. If the assertion encapsulates a profound truth, how much more true must it be when applied to Peyton's clouds? In one sense, they instantly inspire in the onlooker an inward accompaniment of stirring, serene, or haunting musical backdrops. In another sense, they *are* a visual music, an expressionist rendering of the acoustic experience. The whorls, the rhythms and spatial harmonies. And then, more concretely, Peyton himself surely imagined a music ambience while he pushed the camera button and caught the optics -

music of the kind he has provided for the twentyfive-minute video loop in the show. After all, a great deal of his professional work required him to compose a soundtrack for his footage.

If the choice of music as a living furnished an escape from his art-school upbringing, then flying, in turn, offered an escape from the harsh adversities of the music business. “I couldn't believe” says Peyton, “that people paid me to fund my escapism”. Escape. Soaring. Imagining. Setting down. They comprise the co-ordinates of a creative life, and of course a career. But they also describe a spiritual or metaphysical arc. There is no greater destination or metaphor for escape than sky and clouds. Where the spirit escapes when freed from the body, from earthly entanglements. The ultimate release. Peyton's flying is never merely flying, nor his clouds merely clouds. In viewing his visions we are passengers on a quest not simply away from the material and diurnal but on a journey *towards*. Towards what we might ask because the horizon forever recedes; clouds and sky and light are no material destination despite their appearance. They melt away. They embody the infinite.

Peyton's flights, therefore, can be seen as both inner and outer probes towards the immaterial and eternal. His photos invite us to share his flight and probe along with him. They are, in the end, a window onto all our unending forays into the demi-urge, our universal questions about how the beyond may harbor clues to the here and now. We are being told that a life of creativity like Peyton's, at its deepest if deeply pursued, is fundamentally a probe into the nature of creation itself, birthed in the core of limitless boundaries but framed for us to see.

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