

A Czech Artist Explores Memories of New York

By SUSAN HODARA
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IN a corner of “Somewhere in the Night,” painted by the Czech artist Daniel Pitin during his residency at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, a woman seems to float next to a window that frames billowing clouds and a faint bolt of lightning. In the center of the canvas, another woman sits cross-legged on a cot. The room is murky, filled with disembodied platforms and a spindly houseplant. A pillow hovering above the cot looks like it is starting to rot.

Most of the works in “Daniel Pitin: Garrison Landing,” now on view at the art center, depict disjointed elements like these — half-built structures and ethereal figures that remain solitary even when they are not alone. Mr. Pitin, 33, described them in an e-mail as fragments of stories or perhaps dreams. He said his work explored the “personal and public memory of the place where I live.” In the “Garrison Landing” show, that place is New York.

The exhibition — Mr. Pitin’s second solo show in the United States — includes 11 oil paintings and 3 watercolors that he created during his nearly three-month stay in Peekskill late last year. During that time, Mr. Pitin said, he was moved by his proximity to historic Sleepy Hollow and Sing Sing, and by his excursions to galleries and museums in Manhattan,



LOCAL COLOR The light in Peekskill influenced “Lost House,” by Daniel Pitin Dale Leifeste.

which he visited every week. He said the light in Peekskill had infiltrated the work he made here, as in the painting “Lost House,” in which sunshine illuminates the side of a white clapboard house.

But “Lost House” contains darker elements too: a legless man peering into an outdoor cabinet and an oversize torso shadowing the roof — figures, he said, that were derived from the 1979 Czech detective film “Diagnóza Smrti.”

Cinema plays an important role in Mr. Pitin’s work, and that thread persisted during his residency. The women in “Somewhere in the Night” were inspired by the American movie “Caged.” In a painting titled “Psycho,” the facade of a crumbling house resembles the Bates Motel in Alfred Hitchcock’s film.

Mr. Pitin’s works are large and complex, with bits of

newspaper, lace and paper towels embedded on the canvas, and paint applied in drips, splotches and wide brushstrokes. There are objects it takes time to notice: a rifle here, a cat there, a shadowy form in a doorway. Sometimes there are words: “melancholia,” “night,” “Julia what are you doing tomorrow.” In the painting “Bird House,” amid the heavy drapes and baroque furniture, an astute viewer can spot a tiny replica of one of Gerhard Richter’s paintings propped against a wall.

The exhibition includes two videos produced in Prague, where Mr. Pitin lives and works. “He wanted them to be part of his show to give his work context,” said Livia Straus, the director and co-founder of the art center. “Lost Architecture” presents stills of structures in his homeland; “Dinner with Malevich” is an experimental

narrative about art. Mr. Pitin, who is represented by galleries in Prague, Vienna, Los Angeles and New York, has several paintings in “After the Fall,” an exhibition of Eastern European artists concurrently at the center. Those pieces were created before his residency. Contrasting them with the artwork in “Garrison Landing,” Ms. Straus said:

“There’s a world of difference. His work now is more sophisticated, much more intense.”

Mr. Pitin, too, recognized changes. Since his return to Prague, he said, his settings have become less connected to concrete locations. And the light in Peekskill? Mr. Pitin said he managed to preserve the mood he found here for a few weeks in Prague, but now, he said, “I’m getting back to darker colors.”

“Daniel Pitin: Garrison Landing” runs through April 17 at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill. Open Saturday and Sunday, noon to 6 p.m., or by appointment. For more information: hvcca.org or (914) 788-0100.