

Roxy Paine explores nature, folklore and geometry in his latest exhibition
Olivia Martin
Wallpaper
May 5, 2017

Wallpaper*

Embers glow and flicker amid the hyperrealistic charred polyester resin and fibreglass trees, the light intentionally dim. It's as if you have stumbled upon a suspended moment in time; a forest is hazy in the distance. Within seconds, artist Roxy Paine captivates with his new work *Desolation Row* on view as part of his two-venue exhibition at New York's Paul Kasmin Gallery.

A semi-hybrid between Paine's tree-like *Dendroid* series and his dioramas, *Desolation Row* condenses a half-mile viewpoint of a burned down forest into seven feet. 'I've always been interested in our relationship to nature – how it affects us and how we obsessively alter nature and seek to control it,' Paine says. 'To me it's a very melancholy piece. It's dealing with the aftermath. Is this fire manmade? Is it because of how we have altered the planet? Is it just a natural fire?'



Much of Paine's work evoke questions of whether something is or is not. His latest series of *Dendroids*, for example, resemble silver tree sculptures, but study many dendritic forms, such as the branching human vascular and digestive systems and neuron structures. Many of his *Dendroids* illustrate the connectedness of human and nature – at times literally – such as in *After the Flood*, in which a tree is entangled with manmade detritus after a natural disaster.

Paine's dioramas, *experiment* and *Meeting*, express this tension between man and nature from another angle. In *experiment* – a fictional

scene of the true CIA experiment *MKUltra*, during which the CIA drugged unsuspecting people with LSD and hallucinogens – the viewer is positioned in front of a hidden surveillance room behind a two-way mirror that faces an empty bedroom. This perspective is heightened by the absence of people in the work, forcing the viewer to place oneself into the scene.

Meeting, which is intended to convey a community space where a substance support group could gather, uses the circular form as its anchor. 'This idea of the circle of chairs and circular geometry is such an ancient one,' Paine says. 'But then it is in this airless, window-less space with fluorescent lights.' He underscores this relationship between the old and new by writing entries from a dictionary of folklore motifs on the whiteboard, emphasizing the stories we tell repeatedly across time and cultures.