

Ben Steele

The Shape of Things to Come

My newest series of oil paintings is inspired by futuristic architecture, special effects cinematography, and the historical practice of landscape painting. These paintings are all based upon actual models, built in the studio, creatively lit, with projected landscape imagery serving simultaneously as backdrops in addition to veils which attach to the surface of the forms.

I am interested in painters' ability to conjure a sense of place, or reality. They can inspire others to explore, or to dream of lands unseen. I see this practice as related to the history of showing the impossible through special effects in film. I have thus adopted techniques such as scale models, front projection, mirrors, and other optical tricks used in original sci-fi films to construct my models.

I am also drawn to the utopian ideals put forth in futuristic architecture and see this as another way of striving for a world that is just out of reach. The future is never here. The forms that I build refer to futurism in multiple times and places in our world's history. They also may appear to be in a state of ruin. I am interested in how representing ideas of the future from the past creates a tension and feeling of displacement in time.

In this series I have begun to use old master landscape paintings and prints, or details from them as some of my backgrounds. I am interested in how subtlety of color and brushwork combined to create a rich sense of atmosphere. The ability for us to see space at all in these pigments is nothing short of miraculous. Even when projected on a flat wall, behind concrete objects, they provide a sense of infinite depth, mystery, and wonder.