

DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

527 West 29th Street New York NY 10001

Tel 212-925-6190 Fax 212-334-9139

info@davidnolangallery.com

www.davidnolangallery.com

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

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Serban Savu, *Early Days of Summer*, 2008, oil on canvas, 7 7/8 x 11 3/4 inches

Serban Savu

DAVID NOLAN GALLERY

527 W 29th Street

February 5–March 28

Based in Cluj, the painter Serban Savu is one of the most interesting artists to emerge from post-Communist Romania. His paintings depict vast postindustrial landscapes in which people walk around, swim, and engage in everyday activities. His titles, such as *Early Days of Summer* (all works 2008) and *The Traveler*, recall Romantic motifs. Although the titles suggest landscapes in which people might feel safe and at one with nature, this is by no means the case in the paintings. *Genre Scene* and *Mountain of Nostalgia* depict concrete ruins and junkyards. In another work, an enormous industrial highway overpass casts a shadow on a figure trying to sunbathe.

One wonders whether Adorno's contemplation of the Romantic concept of nature, in which a wall overgrown with moss is experienced as a natural landscape, might also apply to a dilapidated industrial road running through a farming village in one of Savu's paintings. There is nothing Romantic about the Communist infrastructure, now scattered about the landscape, as functionless as Duchamp's urinal. One could also describe Savu's paintings as the ruins of a recent future, since his paintings entail an almost existential engagement with Communist utopia: These urban landscapes, which once promised to pave the way to the future, have, in the course of a decade, become relics. People, however, must continue to live in them. Romanticism devalues the present in favor of the elevated and the remote. Savu, however, diminishes both the present and the so-longed-for transcendent. Somewhere in the middle stand his figures, lost, doing what they do every day—primarily, just living.

— *Adina Popescu*