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HYPERALLERGIC

Trevor Winkfield's Cheerfully Sinister Worlds

His rejection of certainty is an urgent reminder that imagination should not be neglected in the pursuit of art.

By John Yau



Trevor Winkfield, "Voyage II" (1996), acrylic on linen (all photos courtesy Tibor de Nagy gallery)

The English-born Trevor Winkfield has taken a unique path that has yet to be fully recognized for its unlikeliness, depth, and breadth. After attending art school in Leeds and getting his master's degree from the Royal College of Art in 1967, he moved to New York in 1969, where he continued to publish a poetry magazine, *Juillard* (1968–72), and made a name for himself among a group of writers and artists known as the New York School. He worked for Arthur Cohen, who sold books and ephemera on 20th-century Modern Art movements such as Dada and Surrealism and made entries to Cohen's encyclopedic catalogs. These were informative, succinct, and witty. He was a polymath whose

knowledge of minor artists and writers, such as Gerald Murphy and Ronald Firbank, was unmatched.

In 1976, Winkfield began painting again, made book covers, and collaborated with poets such as John Ashbery, Charles North, Ron Padgett, and Harry Matthews. He had his New York debut exhibition in 1977, and published his translation of Raymond Roussel's [*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*](#). Roussel, who is widely considered the most eccentric writer of the 20th century, wrote according to linguistic rules based on homophones, words that sound similar but have different meanings. As one might expect, in the years since, critics have tried to connect Winkfield's collage-like paintings of artificial worlds with Roussel's wildly improbable novels, but have never discovered the key, which I feel was never there. As literary as Winkfield is, he is equally a visual person. This complete duality is what makes him inimitable.