

Home/Sweet Home

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Introduction

Home/Sweet Home is an exploration of finding purpose, desire, and destination in an environment of neglect and dismissal. Each painting centers around common elements of domestic spaces, places that initially provide warmth, comfort, and safety. However, the spaces depicted do not offer a situation for retreat; instead, they elicit confusion and instability. They impart a tone of solitude and profound loneliness in the absence of the human. What remains are paltry belongings, dried flowers, and spindly furniture that become dusty and weathered with age. The pictures often refer to the absurd and the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life, and the human inability to find any.

When composing the loose narratives of my paintings I contemplate how an environment shapes a choice, or whether choices are left to chance or within the control of the individual. Interior and exterior environments merge to create uncomfortable settings that suggest the occurrence of past or future events. The spaces are staged and cropped in ways that evoke a sense of unease and allude to events happening outside of the frame. The arrangement of objects and architecture is methodical in placement but becomes unstable by warping their utilitarian use and feasibility. Flowers, chairs, and windows speak conceptually about the human presence that is no longer there and symbolize the inherent neglect of being forgotten for an extended period of time. Detritus on the floors and grime on the walls emphasize the squalor of these abandoned environments.



Amnesia. Oil on canvas. 60in x 54in. 2018.

Ambiguity and Existential Uncertainty

The content within the work often follows the philosophical theory of Existentialism where the individual exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and afterwards, defines themselves through their choices or actions (Sartre 16). Themes recur around the idea of existential crisis and threat, capturing the moment in when the individual must question the meaning, purpose, and value of their life. I incorporate diverging paths or juxtaposed spaces in my imagery to inform these uncomfortable and confusing moments. The moment of defining realization is never reached. I opt instead to keep the space in an ambivalent and turbulent limbo. Through the representation of a perceivable reality and familiarity I distort the image to become estranged from reality, exposing the hidden and uncomfortable aspects of the spaces.



Observing the Remains. Oil on canvas. 60in. x 42in. 2018.

Avoidance of a direct subject is a common theme in my work. In Elkins's essay *Monstrously Ambiguous Paintings*, he refers to the Subject, the Not-Subject, and the Anti-Subject. The painting as Subject declares a single theme and an identifiable genre, understood when the theme is situated at the beginning of interpretation. The Not-Subject is not to be understood as having a primary meaning, message, theme, or genre. The Anti-Subject begins with Subject and attempts to obscure it in whole or part through combination of references to several subjects, or erasing markers of a single ordinary subject. The end product of the work is to give a "feeling of meaning."

According to Elkins, the phenomenon of the possibility that artists may have been attempting to make intentionally ambiguous pictures is a reoccurring theme throughout painting history (Elkins 1-5). This type of ambiguity discussed in Elkins essay is important within my paintings because I wish to elicit certain feelings without giving too much away. It is never my intention to create a direct narrative. The refusal to incorporate a concrete message, concept, or scenario communicates a sense of frustration and confusion about the subject. My work pulls from the history of domestic genre scenes and develops a perverse alteration of the conventional domestic space. The inclusion of symbols, fragmentation, and distorted perceptions from various sources allows the content to hover in a gray area of ambiguity. It is similar to the Anti-Subject in ways that seek to contradict or remove initial meanings and insert others. The paintings present clues to piece together to develop an unstable narrative or emotional response that teeters back and forth according to interpretation.

Window Symbolism and Fragmentation

The window is a recurring motif in my work, signaling entry or serving as a barrier to keep things out. Such passageways are ambiguous because they appear in many forms—open, closed, shuttered, complete, or incomplete. They are portals for looking out and looking in: a face turned outward toward a panoramic view expresses the concept of vision; the face turned inward toward a room expresses voyeurism (Gottlieb 327).



Hide. Oil on canvas. 61in. x 48in. 2017.



Up in Smoke. Oil on canvas. 60in. x 42in. 2018.

I am influenced by painters who work with windows in their subjects such as Lois Dodd, Odilon Redon, Andrew Wyeth, and Balthus. Lois Dodd, a plein air painter, uses windows consistently in her work. She considers both the phenomenological experience they offer and what is extrapolated on the level of imagination. Drawn to the

grid and flatness of the content, Dodd captures myriad reflections and imperfections. She frequently observes abandoned structures that generate a sense of solitude, offering their marks of neglect (Hirsch). The window is an effective grid for dividing the picture, where each pane of 'glass' becomes a small scene or painting. It serves as a barrier or portal for the viewer; an invitation to enter or an obstruction to keep something out. This tension between the external and internal enhances the ambiguity of the image, where the line between spectator, witness, or participant is blurred.



Another Way of Leaving. Oil on canvas. 68in. x 48in. 2018.

Fragmentation is important to the content in my work because it fuels my interest in the idea of containment and isolation to create confined spaces. I outline windows, furniture, and walls to divide the interiors into grids and enclose the space. It is an

effective method to juxtapose the imagery to create the uncomfortable and abstruse environments and scenes in my paintings. Francis Bacon's *Head No. VI* uses fragmentation as a method to cage the figure. Elements of a window can be seen with the window tassel that hangs in front of the screaming face. The image of the tassel was borrowed from a photograph of Adolf Hitler standing at a window in which the shade's tassel hangs in front of his face. The screaming mouth is a reference to the screaming woman from Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (Gottlieb 330-332). His use of various imagery and sources are relevant references to how I collage my sources to create disturbing environments.



Head No. VI. Francis Bacon. Oil on canvas. 36.7in. x 30.1in. 1949.

Cinema

When imagining scenes for my paintings I reflect on the methods cinema shares with the history of storytelling. Film provides a compelling way of looking as it captures scenes through a lens to later be projected onto a two-dimensional screen. Suspense builds through the creation of atmospheric sets paired with ambient sounds. The format of film-making allows the narrative to develop over a series of sequences and time lapses. Future happenings can occur at the beginning and reveal the original catalyst at the end. The role of the viewer is both romantic and voyeuristic, inviting us to observe the character's progress through a foreshadowed or unknown storyline. When composing a painting, I include certain still lifes and props that serve as characters to aid in the narration of unfolding events. Creating tension between interior and exterior spaces pushes the voyeuristic elements and exaggerates the moment of stumbling across a scene that was perhaps best left unwitnessed. This notion that we are witnesses to something beyond our control, whether we are there too soon, too late, or at just the right time, is a theme I include within my paintings. It is an opportunity to capture the emotional essence of a memory or moment and freeze it within time, inviting further analysis for unraveling these vignettes. Working with fragmented images creates a dialogue as they speak to one another. Through these snapshots, the narrative can be pieced together like a film reel.

Cinematography is also a medium that inspires the atmosphere in my paintings, and I look to various films for references. The Russian film *Stalker*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, follows the paths of a professor, writer, and "stalker." Each individual must navigate through a mysterious area called the Zone with the guidance of the stalker.

The Zone demonstrates a level of sentience through its constant state of flux. The movie follows the premise of fulfilling an individual's inner desires, rather than their perceived planned desires. The two clients are guided through the trials of the Zone to their destination: a room that is rumored to grant an individual's deepest desires and wishes. The writer presumably discovers the true nature of the room grants the unconscious desire, ruling over the conscious decision of the individual. With this epiphany, the three decide to not enter the room. Many of the scenes throughout the movie create mystery and intrigue by using contrast in contained decrepit spaces. The atmosphere conveyed in the movie is haunting and unpredictable, highlighting various states of entropy in the environments. The room remains ambiguous because we are only presented with ideas of its nature provided by the potentially unreliable narrators. The idea of making a perilous journey to a destination that is reached but never entered speaks to the states of limbo in which my paintings rest. Much like *Stalker*, they never come to a final resolution or conclusion.

Media

My primary media is oil on canvas. The viscosity of the paint and the slow drying process allow me to create atmospheres where vague forms pull out of the darkness. Glazing over objects in the paintings makes them appear as if they are placed behind a veil, not quite apparent but not quite gone. Color and light help me create and explore these atmospheric fields by building color relationships and imparting specific notions of mood, time of day, and temperature in the composition. The variety of chromatic hues and rich browns and ochres work together to build dramatic internal and external

spaces with high contrast. The deep tones of the earth colors provide a backdrop for the intense, high chroma colors like red cadmiums. Layering saturated cobalt blue and ultramarine elicits an eerie, frigid glow. Reds become the life-blood of the paintings, signifying a connection to the earth and the body. Blood is life-giving but it is also a destructive force. When the world is in a state of flux, a birth marks a death to the previous world, and death's departure from this world marks the arrival to the next. The color red symbolizes these arrivals and departures, drawing attention to the human absence within the paintings. The size of each canvas is built roughly to the size of the human body, creating a relatable and intimate atmosphere and space for the viewer, allowing them to feel like they can step into the painting.



Afterthoughts. Oil on canvas. 60in. x 36in. 2017.

Process

My process involves hiking, collecting, viewing, and working from memory. Hiking is a means to connect my thoughts to the natural world. Much like the existentialist themes and pursuit of purpose in *Stalker*, hiking in nature is a path I embark on where the end eventually meets the beginning. It is after the active event, when I have processed the experience I am able to reflect on what I saw, felt, or ruminated about. While trekking on this loop I am able to immerse myself in the eerie landscapes that are murky with fog, inhabited by abandoned old houses and berry shacks. They provide mundane visual stimuli and information consumed daily, taken for granted and overlooked. I find a lot of character in the buckling of the clapboard siding of rundown houses. Their old wooden floors with slight curves and gouges from foot traffic tell stories spanning decades. Abandoned barns and sheds brimming with hordes of forgotten junk and antiques retain their mystery, neglect, and disorder. These small visual cues tell a narrative that I want to analyze and ponder. I am intrigued by the absence of the person and the neglected emptiness of what remains behind.

On my hikes, I collect odd objects that have been lost and forgotten by their prior owners. Nature offers in bounty dried flowers, old bones, and beautiful stones. I bring these materials back to the studio, where they are revered as tiny relics, gaining new importance and meaning from their original mundane purpose. Observing these objects, I begin a series of small sketches, studies, and thumbnail drawings, analyzing the form, color, and texture, gradually developing them into abstraction. After making several studies, I incorporate them into my paintings, often working from memory. Small, abstracted objects are arranged in still lifes within small cabinetry and on tables,

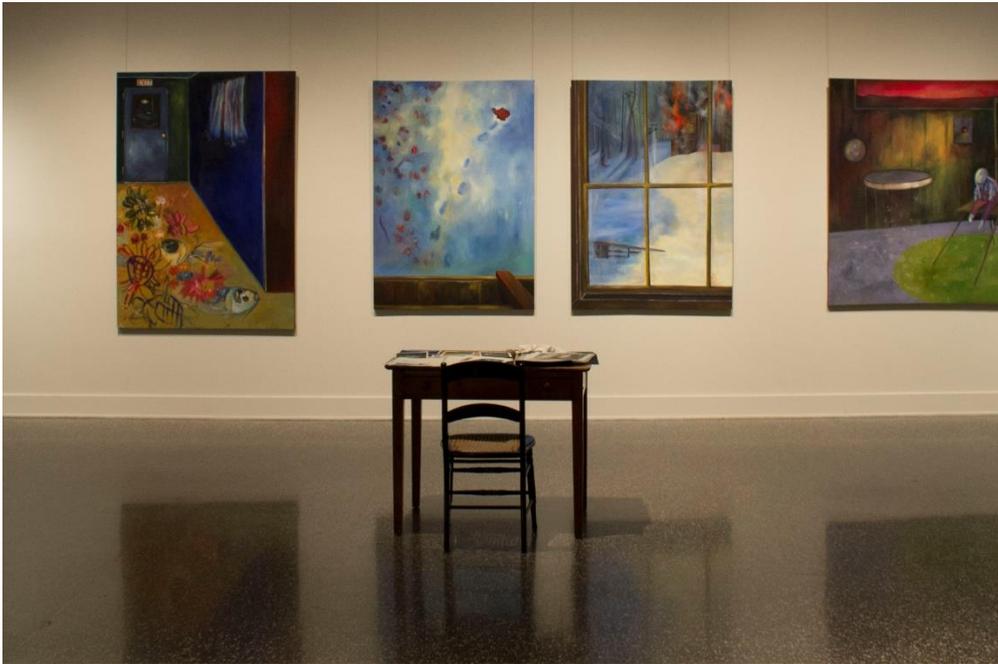
and at times become a tiny painting hanging on the wall within the physical painting. When I am unable to obtain physical resources, I rely on photography to document the bizarre and odd occurrences I stumble upon by happenstance in the environment. I use these references to collage various elements from the photographs into a single composition. The use of these motifs from various sources is a type of fragmentation in and of itself. The photographs, natural forms, and memories merge together to create a fragmented picture.

Conclusion

The process of making this body of work has encouraged investigation into the portrayal of loneliness and isolation; a human condition that can be overlooked or underrepresented in our quest for individualism. The depiction of vacant and deteriorated spaces communicates these themes explicitly. The work seeks to form connections between life, death, and grief on a personal and intimate level. I want to continue skewing the perceptions of the domestic scene through the use of light, grids, and color. The limits and boundaries of beauty and dysfunction can continue to be pushed. I believe ambiguity to be an important aspect of human life because it invites the individual to contemplate and process events of uncertainty and opens up many new possibilities. My future work will continue to ask open ended questions that may not always have an answer.



Thesis Installation View I. May 2018.



Thesis Installation View II. May 2018.

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