

Andrews, Brian, “(((Ω.))) and Half Truths and Outright Lies”, ART PRACTICAL, 21 February 2011.



(((Ω.))) and Half Truths and Outright Lies

Guerrero Gallery’s current exhibitions of work by Ryan Wallace and Hilary Pecis combine to form a densely hung visual experience, demonstrating how presentation and context can dramatically shape the perception of an artwork. In the main space, Wallace’s intricate series of oil paintings, *(((Ω.)))*, glisten with glitter and specular highlights. Intricate brushstrokes weave into a diffuse central glow in a way that could never be adequately captured in a web-resolution image. It is the kind of visual experience that requires a viewer to invest the time for their perceptions to adapt to the lighting of the space, and to develop an understanding of how the reflections and refractions fuse within the painting’s surface.

This visual reverie is interrupted in the installation by the sheer repetition of nearly identical canvases in tight proximity to each other. The frequency seemingly degrades the potency of each piece, shifting the interpretation of the sequence of paintings to the act of repetition itself. Robbed of this perceptual intimacy, the series as a whole shifts to a veneer of pop decadence, as if the canvases were nightclub promotions. This presentation invokes Richard Meltzer’s infamous review of Creedence Clearwater Revival’s *Pendulum*, which begins: “You you you kinda kinda kinda get get get the the the impression pression pression that that that Creedence Creedence Creedence Clearwater water water keeps keeps keeps doing doing doing the the the same same same thing thing thing over over over and and and over over over again again again.”¹ While Meltzer’s echoing motif can be read as trite or superfluous criticism, it exposes the consequences of critically focusing too narrowly on a specific artistic strategy, to the detriment of the body of work as a whole. This phenomenon is of course not unique to Wallace, as many galleries and artists have maintained their solvency by effectively creating editions of abstract paintings. Unfortunately, in this presentation, the captivating qualities of the individual works are overwhelmed by their echoes in the space.

In the project space, Pecis' concurrent exhibition overflows with figurative content. Pecis presents digital photo collages on an expanded scale, constructing hectic landscapes populated by kittens, motorcycles, rainbows, and fighter jets. The delightfully entrancing print *Kingdom* (2011) features fantasy castles bathed in billowing clouds, exuberantly celebrating with waterslides, kittens, and confetti. While the contents of the photo collages may be rooted in the visual tropes of many common Internet memes, a curious shift of their social value takes place in this series. The large scale of these giclée prints, as well as their expanded resolution and print quality, effectively shift the context away from the disposability of Internet culture onto fresh ground where the compositions can be viewed unburdened. These humorous scenarios can then be read in the continuum of representational landscapes, from the Hudson River school to Thomas Struth.

As the larger printed format shifted the contextual implications of the images, so too does it alter the reception of its craft and materiality. Basic Photoshopping is de rigueur on the Internet, but can be somewhat jarring in prints of this scale. These prints float in between; they are collage composited with a moderate amount of digital craft. The images are neither proudly exposing the rough act of composition nor immersing the viewer with a professional seamlessness, both of which may have been more interesting visual strategies for these whimsical compositions.

Both of these exhibitions share a playful exuberance and a kinetic visuality, but are also bound by the optical scale and density of the audience negotiating the gallery space.

(((Ω))) and Half Truths and Outright Lies are on view at Guerrero Gallery, in San Francisco, through March 5, 2011.