

Kit White

Comment on the paintings

Over the years, I have approached the space of my paintings as metaphorical landscapes. They have horizons and are occupied by linear elements that act as surrogates for structures both organic and inorganic. But because paintings are wholly created spaces, the parameters by which they are judged are formal in nature. All content reaches the viewer through a formal lens. Yet, it is the other lens, the photographic lens, through which we now receive most of our knowledge of the world and contextualizes most of what we know of it.

This realization led me several years ago to start incorporating photographic images into my drawings as backdrops to abstract lines. The resulting image conflated the recognizable world, the photograph, with the metaphoric world of drawing. I found that the two could occupy the same space and inform each other in such a way that they each became a commentary on the other; the photograph providing a material, worldly context for the drawing and the drawing eliciting an acknowledgement of the abstract nature of all images, even those that purport to represent the “real”.

Because land, the basis of landscape, is territory and usually occupied, often contested, it is politically symbolic. And so, to underscore this issue, I sought out images of land that was the source of conflict. Initially, the images I employed were of the contested spaces of what we have traditionally referred to as the Middle East, places where claims to land are the source of conflict. These conflicts surround us and announce themselves through walls, barriers, and borders, all of which symbolize the fraught politics of occupation. But these barriers are not always physical. I found myself drawn to Matthew Brady’s photographs of the Civil War and started thinking about the psychological wall born of that conflict which remains with us today.

This is a different view of landscape from the picturesque, the scenic. It is land as an active player in our sense of self and the politics that erupt from those identifications with physical as well as cultural and mental spaces. It is also, like these images, part real and part imagined. Landscape is a complex conflation of

ambitions, affinities, motivations and identities. At this moment, not to acknowledge the political nature of landscape is to miss one of the greatest issues of the moment.

Process of the paintings

These paintings all start with a photographic image that is transferred with solvent to paper as a small scale drawing. This process eliminates much of the detail of the photograph and makes it a ghost of the original. This indistinctness serves two purposes; it renders the image general, not specific, and it pushes the photo in the direction of becoming more atmosphere and metaphor than documentary information. It sets the stage for the drawing that I add over the photograph in an attempt to respond to the valence of the image. The drawing, at this point, becomes a dance between the two. The photograph makes a physical location which the lines of the drawing inhabit. Often, the lines will create their own alternate, competitive space to the backdrop photo setting up an equivalency between the two. This balance seems necessary for each component to claim its respective power and meaning.

In the larger paintings, the photographic transfers are digitized, then printed onto a mylar film that is treated to accept inkjet ink. A solvent which lifts the ink from the film is applied to the painting surface and when the film is applied to this solvent and then removed, the photographic image is transferred to the painting surface. Once dry, this image is then painted onto. The process allows more nuance than a silk screen, and allows the manipulated photograph to retain its character and texture.