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Blue Balloons and White Fog

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Stephanie Meredith

Written Statement

My paintings begin with an examination of photography's authority; practically the ubiquitous family snapshot's power over memory and the development of our constructed identity. The amateur photographer's desire for a pleasantly scripted narrative can easily misrepresent the reality of a moment. Because of this, I see family photo albums as mythological artifacts: they arise out of reality but are incapable of fully reproducing it. By using my own family photographs as reference material I embrace this mythology, indulging myself in a fantasy of place, history and narrative. This interest in the mythology of my past is contradicted by my own fear of fetishized nostalgia and a desire to derail the narrative of my family snapshots. My own attraction and disenchantment with narrative is combined into a compromising gesture that intertwines abstraction and representation and tangles the relationship each painting has to time: speaking of the past, present and future simultaneously.

I begin by taking photographs of my family snapshots. The distorted copies disrupt the constructed narrative of each original photo. These photographs, which I consider a portrait of a photo, are taken at angles that manipulate the perspective and capture light reflections. Next in Photoshop using a crudely scribbled white mark I conceal the central enticement to any family photo: the people. I do this, because instead of creating an analyzed moment of my past I want my work to function as a manifestation of perception, showcasing the manipulations time and history have on our present awareness.

The paintings further the conversation by highlighting a fleeting continuous consciousness through sweeping brushstrokes, drips and thin application of paint. This creates work that functions as an abstraction on the brink of becoming something recognizable. On the other hand, the depictions of solidly rendered objects and flat shapes evoke a static memory of photographs taken of events now forgotten. With a play between depth and flatness the space I create acts as a convergence of place, both interior and exterior: still life and landscape. The saccharin romanticism of time and place is counterbalanced with a self-indulgent curiosity that my paintings utilize in clumsy compositions and awkward colors. It is an attempt to make the unworkable work. Like a nervous laugh in a tense situation these elements create a humorous gesture alongside the elegant and moody.

Because the images and materials I work with can easily become fetishized, I am highly conscious of their seduction, almost repulsed by it, which leads to the abstraction of imagery, but also a limitation of my materials. I paint thinly in an attempt to control paint's perversion, but like every aspect of my work this becomes a contradiction: as a painting's qualities are not erased by mere thinness. The attempt to control and distance myself from my medium and subject matter always fails, but it is within this failure a compelling transformation happens. The nostalgic longing of my source material never disappears, but through abstraction and gesture the images begin to function in the present, but most importantly they project into the future. It is here that the biggest change happens, as the paintings play, engage and fantasize they are looking towards the future rather than the past.