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The City with Rolling Hills

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Andrew Ballstaedt
MFA Thesis Show 2010
Claremont Graduate University
Artist Statement

I use painting as a form of ritual and meditation where I often spend lots of time painting and repeating simple marks over and over again. On occasion, I am able to make quick paintings that are successful but most of the time I am compelled to spend repetitive hours making marks in order to reach my state of personal mediation through the ritual of painting.

Counter-balancing the simplicity in my paintings is compositional intensity. I use minutia, systems of repetition, and grouping to create complexity out of basic units. One way I group is by making families, tribes, and clans of repeated imagery. The families can be composed of football players, monsters, or entire cities. Other groups contain stripes of color next to each other, waves, or hills.

All of this makes decoding necessary when viewing my work. I am inspired by the nautical maps of the 16th century. Cartographers of this time made dream-like maps with oceans, fortress cities on hills, and directions leading to the intended destination. Often these complex charts offer more mystery, intrigue, and promise than the destination itself.

I too want to become the cartographer of a cosmology and allow fantastical maps, zones, shapes, patterns, and lands to be born. I set out on a journey to create permanent settlements of color. During this process, I fortify some communities of imagery while others are painted over and lost. I seek to understand the jurisdiction, borders, and frontiers of my paintings and take control of the spatial real estate in the worlds I discover there.

I also use archeology to explore geological terrain. I find remnants of old systems in geometric lines that have been etched into the paper. These are like ghostly traces from another world lurking behind layers of paint.

Eventually, complexity reaches a point of overload. It neutralizes itself into a unified field that can no longer be decoded. At this point the work returns to simplicity and once again reaches a place where it can be straightforward, simple, and honest.