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Tangled Up In Blue

Bryan E. Miller

Claremont Graduate University

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BRYAN MILLER
TANGLED UP IN BLUE
Claremont Graduate University - Peggy Phelps Gallery
October 24th 29th, 2011



My paintings revolve around the lush and tropical surroundings of my homeland, Hawaii. This environment is personal and familiar. It is also generic and packaged for and by the tourist industry, sought out for its beauty, recreational allure and cultural significance. Building on my personal connection with these surroundings, my work focuses on the attitudes and expectations that locals and visitors bring to this environment. In my paintings, dialogues of identity, comfort and control become complex. They often lead to surprising, even unsettling encounters, where self-discovery comes by surprise.

With the awareness of the underlying complexities and my own belonging in flux within these seemingly simple places I wanted to find a kind of shift that brought about a new realization towards a state of comfort and belonging. This impetus was carried out through bringing a blue tarp into the space. In Hawaii, like many other places, the tarp is a common object used to protect and preserve. I grew up seeing the utilitarian blue square used as the default choice to create outdoor awnings and canopies, becoming a way of demarcating and establishing areas of comfort and temporal ownership. I saw the tarp as a practical and at times beautifully simple solution, yet still very foreign and out of place in the environments it is commonly used in. With its strong formal qualities and familiar social presence, the tarp seemed to be the natural and pragmatic starting point to initiate a shift in relation to these environments.

Through stretching, laying, hanging, draping, and even wrestling with the tarp within the space I built a formal

and psychological vocabulary to bring back into the studio. Using these impromptu experiences with the tarp as starting points, my paintings are more elaborately composed encounters with the unexpected. Playing off the abstract characteristics of the synthetic blue square and the engulfing presence of the forest, my paintings are interruptions of the social and cultural dynamics that arise within a viewer's confrontation with his own expectations of what a landscape painting should be. Visually, the paintings fall into a transitory state, an in-between where the tarp and the interventions of man are in contention with the landscape – ownership is fleeting and identity is conflicted, contentious, and partially concealed. My approach to painting is similar to that of my occupation within the surroundings. It is an experimental process of discovery that is manifested in a loose and expressive mode that moves in and out of various marks and gestures and a palette that keeps the work grounded in local color. Whether familiar with these places or not, my aim is to create shared visceral experiences that reflect the transitory search for comfort, both in a viewer's memories of his own past, home and background as well as in front of my works, trying to find some respite in a picture that departs from the conventions of exotic, tropical landscape to embrace a more truthful and troubled reality.