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Kathleen Melian MFA Thesis - Lalaland

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I paint opulent interiors, using rich colors and sensual paint to create pictures that capture both luxury and success while embodying its nightmarish underbelly. Beautiful illusions are present yet disintegrating. Each painting remains not fully resolved, flawed, broken, deteriorating in some way. The scenes deliver a feeling that things are not quite as they seem, a hint of desperation concealed by order, taste and ritual. Flawlessness gives way to underlying falsity as the appearance of a well lived life begin to shift underfoot.

I am interested in the struggle in our culture to project an image and the burden of that endeavor. This preoccupation with image creation permeates our society as a whole and is not bound by social or economic status. In this body of work, I wish to expose a sense of the emotional fallout of such existence, and the truth beneath the fiction. A twist to this narrative, is that the falsity is also a source of pleasure and enjoyment. This creative reinvention of self, although fraught with desperation and anxiety, offers intense satisfaction as participants take roles like actors who vie for fame and attention. The Hollywood party scene has taught us this.

My paintings deploy visual cues from stage sets and references to the history of portraiture and landscape painting. I invoke some film techniques to create settings like the illusion of expansive space, focal points, angles, color saturation and even “the curtain.” Theatricality lends itself to the way I feel we view our lives and the way our culture experiences the lives of others. Architectural spaces in my paintings are intended to evoke human presence or absence. They are inanimate objects that have been imbued with meaning and given the power to function as symbols of a certain status. This bestows upon inhabitants of the space either inhibition or inspiration for their behavior within the environment. I employ the images as an object of identity for the viewers, forging a connection with the subjects. The scenes become stand-ins for the observer offering them a voyeuristic window to another life.

The imperfections and inconsistent aspects are the most interesting for me because this is where potential lies for rupture as truth and fiction collide. The fun of the charade grates on the spirit, beginning to wear thin.

In my work, the fantasies created by society multiply and become a complex system that deceives and creates a pseudo-reality, an entrapment for people. It becomes impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction. Society becomes a place of myth and artifice, both terrifying and sublime.