

The Painting Imperative

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Alex Fischer – Building on the History of Painting through Digital Layering

As I approached O'born Contemporary's (based in Toronto, Canada) space at this year's NYC Volta I was particularly interested in the colourful images that ranged in subject matter from grotesque portraiture reminiscent of Francis Bacon, to large open landscapes referencing late 19th century European painting.



At a distance, the work is defined through broad, bold painterly strokes and swirls of abstractions; simultaneously I notice that there are some detailed fine lines that drive certain pieces through optical manipulation, as seen in *Parrots* (2011).

Though there are numerous formal connections within the entire body of work, I actually questioned if one artist completed it all. The "portraits" appear to be more of a collage of verifiable objects, whereas the landscapes are created through a collage of textures, patterns, and colour. The portraits lend themselves to the common vernacular of recent art school graduates, making seemingly definitive statements about society. On the other hand, the "landscapes" place an individual within a larger environment of symbols that allow for potentiality and investigation into a story.



After being introduced to the work from afar, I am now within the space and I realize that the portrait paintings are not paintings at all. They are digital images, easily seen in *Bluenose* (2011).

Yet, I am still convinced that the landscapes are in fact paintings in the traditional sense. In *The Infant and the Garden Hose* (2011) the subtle gradation from sky, to sea, to greenery, coupled with layers of transparency to opacity appears to be the effects of oil paint. Only when the gallery owner approaches me, do I learn that the entire space is one artist, Alex Fischer, and ALL the paintings are digital pieces.



The work being exhibited at Volta is from Fischer's exhibition *Beyond the Fall* at O'born Contemporary, February/March 2012 (www.artofalexfisher.com/category/documentation/beyond-the-fall-at-obc/)

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“The images of Beyond the Fall come from what has become the predominant first-world interface: The personal computer and internet capable device is now the primary filter by which broad swaths of people interact and know themselves. These technologies have the ability to snake our attentions, beliefs and desires, influencing cognition and our experience of the world. In order to represent these paradigm shifts, Alex Fischer reifies the low-culture of individualistic habits and persuasions to be in dialogue with the ripe philosophy of high art. His chosen medium of digital collage compliments his artistic process, by which he paints together images from a collection of digital sources. Each piece concedes to multiple interpretations due to Fischer's choice to obscure the visual space of the image into near abstraction. The narratives encompass characters, scenes, and symbols with all of their ambiguity, insight, and metaphysical baggage on display. The content originates from their adaptations to and the impact of this current age.”

(www.oborncontemporary.com/catalogue/Alex%20Fischer.html)

After digesting all the visual information from O'Born Contemporary's space, I was impressed with the artist ability to surprise me; more importantly he did not look to shock, there was no sensationalism, no quick tricks. Fischer utilizes technologies to merge history and multi-media. By doing so, he is able to subtly provoke a variety of emotions.



Most successful are the larger landscapes that build upon the history of painting, and allow for drama to occur in the composition that is not mandated but rather provoked. In these pieces Fischer collages together gathered and created visual information. These pieces have layered meanings that leave me questioning the solo-endeavor of the individual within a community that is dense with information. I see the journey we all take, both literally and metaphorically in the pieces: not determined, still unfolding. Fischer allows for us to contemplate our own path while also allowing us to think about how technology does not always need to be exercised and interpreted in the same manner each time. Not everything is as it seems, and when we address this human condition from a diplomatic place we can be less jaded, more forgiving, and ideally able to represent the current time period without imposing opinion. I am all for creating the conversation, facilitating the direction of the story, while managing not to state the conclusion.



Alex Fischer lives in Toronto, Canada. A sociologist of internet culture, Fischer mediates the visual and theoretical philosophies, which can be accessed through contemporary technology. This extraction and the resulting dissemination are essential to his approach to art-making, which is at once reactionary and projective. His images are composed by digitally assembling visual and conceptual sources in order to explore the syncretic effect of the digital-age.

All images courtesy of O'born Contemporary
www.oborncontemporary.com

Image 1: *Parrots*, Digital Image, Giclée Print, 2011, 14280 x 10200 pixels (84 x 60 inches), Print Edition: 3

Image 2: *Beyond The Fall*, Digital Image, Giclée Print, 2011, 14720 x 9907 pixels (64 x 43 inches), Print Edition: 3

Image 3: *Bluenose*, Digital Image, Lightjet Print, 2011, 3400 x 4640 pixels (11 x 15 inches), Print Edition: 4

Image 4: *Island*, Digital Image, Giclée Print, 2011, 14400 x 7200 pixels (24 x 48 inches), Print Edition: 3

Image 5: *Straw Man*, Digital Image, Giclée Print, 2012, 40500 x 21600 pixels (180 x 96 inches), Print Edition: 2

Erin Treacy lives and works in New York City. She is a Fulbright Fellow, Ireland: 2009-10, holds her BFA from Pratt Institute and her MFA from University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, and is an exhibiting artist, curator and educator.

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