



Ryan McGinness
Aesthetic Comfort
Curated by Randy Gladman
September 27, 2008 – November 15, 2008

An Interview with Ryan McGinness

What is the common thread running through this body of work and how does it distinguish itself (subtly or dramatically) from previous bodies of work?

I've been pushing my color palette in the past couple of years, and this body of work is the latest iteration of that push - to the point where the works have to be viewed in an alternate light spectrum that allows the colors to really pop. I'm interested in creating work that must be viewed and experienced in person and not only in reproduction. Therefore, I've been working with pearlescent and metallic paints and most recently, fluorescents.

My read is that by using the black light - you are pushing even further into a full sensory environment. Is there anything in the individual imagery of the paintings or wall vinyl that connects them?

As you know, the paintings are a mash-up of individual images that are developed through a drawing process that starts with thumbnail sketches, pen on paper, and get refined as digital vector files. These are then made into screens and collaged together through the painting process. In content, the individual images continue to be about everything in my life, and the origins continue to be from a broad range of sources - from dreams and hallucinations to pop songs and art history. In this way, I describe the paintings not as landscapes of an external world, but as mindscapes of a personal inner space. (And not "mindscapes" while holding up two fingers in a peace sign, man, but rather a reflection of the mind as a random-access memory machine.) If the world is really only in our minds, then these paintings are a true reflection of my world. Furthermore, I do hope that the compositions and picture plane constructions reflect the psychedelic experience which reveals this true nature of the universe - a fractal-based infinite ever-flowing continuum.

The Aesthetic Comfort paintings are primarily about aesthetics, not specific meanings. Form, not content. One of the things that I've always tried to do with the work is use aesthetics as a Trojan Horse to sneak in front of the viewer my world and then penetrate the viewer's mind with fragments from mine. I champion beauty as the vehicle and

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believe beauty is a concept that is not easily understood, because it cannot easily be articulated with the same concrete language often used to explain work based on simple ideas. (I used to make work that was more about the expression of simple ideas, but it always left me feeling empty.) However, the irony is that these beautiful paintings are composed of very carefully considered iconic images that strive to communicate with universal forms. It is this push and pull between content and form, between literal meaning and intuitive feeling that parallels my own struggles in life. We are inclined to impose meaning onto the chaotic universe. We use religion, faith, fate, horoscopes, and that general reasoning of "it was meant to be" to help us come to terms with the meaninglessness of it all. Aesthetics comfort me when confronted with the dismal fact that none of this matters.

I grew up in the 1980s skate and surf scene of Virginia Beach, Virginia. From an early age, I recognized the power of logos, icons, and branding as they were used to increase perceived value for otherwise ordinary objects such as t-shirts, skateboards, and surfboards. Because I could not afford the commodities with the recognized signs and signifiers of what was cool, I made my own shirts and painted my own boards. I began to assume this mysterious corporate power for myself and understood this subversion as a way to flip the mainstream cultural situationism to my advantage. I soon realized that when I applied my art skills in this way, I was practicing a thing called design, and I went on to secure a scholarship at Carnegie Mellon University to study it. While there, I continued a parallel study in art with concentrations in art theory, philosophy, and post-modernism. The design disciplines of shaping forms aimed at clear and concise communication and of manipulating picture planes began to inform my paintings. This is where my work comes from.

My goal for over a decade now has been to penetrate the art world with an aesthetic that has otherwise resided in the world of anonymous design. I'm trying to communicate complex and poetic concepts with a cold, graphic, and authoritative original visual vocabulary—my work is not about appropriation as I am the creator of my own imagery. As such, the work resides somewhere between abstraction and representation. While I use the computer as a tool in the development of my drawings, I believe in making paintings, and not making plans for paintings. That is to say, I allow the painting process to inform the aesthetic outcome of the work. Because my drawings exist as digital imagery, I am able to move beyond the Warholian repetition of the single variable to the deployment of infinitely variable images that takes advantage of their inherent liquid digital state.

My paintings are smash-up combines of painted drawings each individually and uniquely replicated through the silkscreen process.

The drawings reflect different aspects of my life and are inspired by diverse cultural input and observations—from dreams and hallucinations to pop songs and art history. I am interested in our desire to make sense of chaos and give meaning to seemingly abstract forms. With my work, interpretations are not absolute, but guided, allowing the viewer to bring to the work his own history, memories, and knowledge to find a personalized meaning.

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