



grayDUCK Gallery - "A Certain Reality"

STORY BY LINDSEY WILDE FLATT MARCH 2013

The South by Southwest season brings with it a strong sense of unreality, of having been suddenly transplanted to an Austin in a parallel universe. A parallel universe in which the population, traffic, noise, beer consumption and sense of entitlement have all doubled. This is not to say that SXSW isn't a fun time, but rather that is a period during which it is almost impossible for your routine, and your world, not to be shaken up. It's hard to imagine anything comparable to the fantastical over stimulation found in the quickly impending, culturally driven ground invasion - however, it's out there, albeit in a more manageable space of contained, (mostly) 2D energy.

Since it's inception, grayDUCK Gallery, nestled in a small, unassuming warehouse off of South First, has done an outstanding job, both curating the finest local works, and at bringing together unique exhibits and installations of out-of-state talents. Just in time for a season which both delights and disrupts Austin's collective sense of self, grayDUCK is facilitating a brush with three very different, very distinct, and delicately disturbing sets of works for a show entitled "A Certain Reality".

"A Certain Reality" brings together three artists, Megan Kimber, David Ball, and Jennifer Davis, all of whom reveal strange, ethereal landscapes and characters in images at once intricate and simple, patterned with complexity but outlined and colored with a bold restraint. As grayDUCK asserts, "the show explores the spaces between reality and imagined perceptions," where the viewer is invited into a narrative of imagined memories and relationships.

Interview with Megan Kimber

Megan Kimber is a multimedia artist who received an MFA in illustration from the Savannah College of Arts, and who has since settled in Alabama. Recently, she has taken to incorporating found objects into her already haunting works in order to create an even more immediate and physically sentimental connection with the viewer.

ATX Beyond Arts + More: How many pieces will you be showing in "A Certain Reality"?

Megan Kimber: Right now I am finishing up my seventh painting, and I am hoping to crank out another 1 or 2 before framing and shipping times kick in

ATX Beyond: Are there any primary themes you have kept in mind during your creations for this show?

MK: Oh yes, for sure. I can honestly say that this group of paintings I have chosen to work on is incredibly personal and autobiographical, which I have not done in my work for a very, very, very VERY long time! I think that most people, whether it's realized or not, have applied a "certain reality" to how they live their lives and thus, how they survive. "Certain" is a key word - it sounds like a solid absolute term, but in this context, "A Certain Reality", I feel it is subjective. Reality can be an all-encompassing word but it's definitely not universal. Everyone has their own world they live in, their own patterns and rhythms to their days, the way they view the world and people and things around them. I am guilty of that. I am a hermit. The older I get, the less I can relate to most people around me, but I'm ok with that, I'm an independent person. I am fascinated with animals and plants and little pieces of aged things I can hold in my hands. I like simplicity, I like quietude. Back to my personal note - the work is very reflective of how I view myself and the world. Either how I view it, or how I would like it to be; how I view myself and/or how I would love myself to be.

ATX Beyond: You have ascribed much of your inspiration, both for your color palette and some of your imagery, to your grandparents' farm in upstate New York during the summers. Could you describe some of the images or memories that most haunt you from this period of your life? (My use of the word "haunt" is not meant in any negative sense, nor an implication of negative experiences, but rather that your works seem to carry with them a sentiment of that strange sort of childhood mythology that is born from the magical experience of solitary youth exploring nature - I feel I recognize it, I suppose.)

MK: Oh I love that place so much; it is truly what I associate with being the closest thing to home I can think of. I am lucky that I still get to visit this place almost every summer. Images that always stay with me from the land up there...lush forest with a thick canopy and glowing light coming through to a ground of ferns or moss. A beach made of small, rounded shale stones - and searching for the lucky ones with holes through them. Minuscule frogs that hatched from tadpoles, no bigger than my pinky nail. Finding fossils in steep cuts of shale rock up by a waterfall in the forest. I remember my grandmother showing me these night blooming flowers that opened up these huge white blooms when it was night. They would be lit by moonlight and just looked like these beautiful floating benevolent entities in the dark. I also remember once running deep through the woods back towards the house and there was a motion next to me. I thought it was our dog that had caught up with me, but when I turned and looked, it was a huge deer, a buck, running parallel to me about 20 feet away. It was huge, with antlers and everything. It was exceptional. I mean, this place has imagery you dream about. This last summer I was there, my father and I saw red foxes playing in the meadow near the house. They were gorgeous.

ATX Beyond: Your works have a very fantastical and surrealistic element to them, combined with a sort of earthy realism. They are reminiscent, to me, of a combination of the Brothers Grimm and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Are there any particular artists, books or fairy tales that have served as inspiration to your style?

MK: You are coming up with the best questions! I love the author Barbara Kingsolver. I love her involvement and great respect of nature in her works, and her ability to combine reality with a subtle mysticism and awe. Of course, growing up I LOVED the Brothers Grimm. There have been many artists during my life that have inspired me. From Egon Schiele and Sally Mann to Degas to more modern artists that I find online via different networks. The main thing honestly that has inspired me this year has been looking at old tints and ambrotypes. They have always fascinated me ever since I was little but only now have I started using them as an inspiration for my work.

ATX Beyond: You've done a series of paintings for Yellow Brand Skateboards, and some of your most recent works include multimedia elements. It seems as though you're game to explore different kinds of materials and mediums in your pieces. How has this evolved over your career, and what sparks your decisions on what materials a piece needs, or should be presented on?

MK: Yes, I used to mainly just use acrylic paint and just "paint" in that traditional sense. I reached a point about 3 years ago where I just honestly got sick of working with acrylics and wondered what I could do next. I still wanted to create with similar imagery, but I also wanted it to feel more "earthy" and tactile, and get back to my love of drawing in my sketchbook. There were 2 local artists I knew that used inks, whose work I greatly admire. So I experimented with inks and washes; using pen and ink to draw certain aspects and tiny detailing yet retaining painterly effects with washes and brush strokes. For a long time I have had a habit of being pretty obsessed with collecting odd bits of things I find -- the old and more worn the better. It can be paper, fabric, ribbon, bits of ceramics, fossils, flattened leaves, animal bones, you name it. I decided to take a chance to see if I could incorporate these items actually into the paintings in a collage style, without overwhelming the painting. I like to keep the paintings kind of timeless looking, yet reminiscent of an older time. Incorporating these tactile, aged, physical items just seemed like a perfect union and I wanted to be able to pull it off. I felt it would give the paintings what I really needed them to say. It adds a reality of sorts that I think people unconsciously recognize when they view my work, so maybe that pulls them in more.



"Adrift 2" by David Ball

(in my process) is very much like finding a needle in a haystack. I sort through bins and bins of pre-cut material to find a suitable piece. To do this over and over again is much too time consuming so I decided that, by going through the collage sorting phase with multiple in mind, I could make better use of my efforts. After that point, I work on them one at a time in acrylic and colored pencil, cycling onto a different work when I grow tired of the piece that I am currently working.

I feel though that the depth of the relationship to the concept of each individual piece suffers a bit for this at times. In this sense, I found it hard to build this show, I started out going through some heavy emotions at the onset of the production and had evolved beyond the feelings conveyed in the piece before the work was done. In this way, the relationship between the piece and my emotions failed to synch up anymore. I didn't want to be working on a piece about an emotion that I wasn't feeling so I decided to just destroy those that were unfinished and start over.

ATX Beyond: Each of your figures contains an amalgamation of recognizable images and objects that have been abstracted but are then combined into a larger figure that is recognizable in its abstraction. Do these figures present themselves in the materials that you draw them from? Is the creation process of these figures organic - something that changes and shifts as you add layers and materials - or do you have a specific idea of what they will be at the outset?

DB: Yes, the process is organic for sure. I do not have a specific idea in mind when I start. During the initial stages of the collage, components are abstract - used for what they suggest as a shape or for their use as planes. Once a concept emerges and I have the chosen collage components for that piece glued down, I form a more personal relationship with the piece and the collage components chosen from then on are usually suggestive of the over arching idea/feeling. Sometimes they are emotional but sometimes they're whimsical. It really all depends on the mood that I am in. I try not to give greater importance to sadness simply for the sake of drama. Sometimes it comes up that becomes the focus. Other days, I am happy and that is what is suggested.

ATX Beyond: You have noted in the past that you are interested in "observed relationship dynamics and social commentary." Can you explain in a little more detail how these interests manifest in your artwork?

DB: This manifests itself in my work at times, but as of recent, not as much. I feel mainly that work tends to be an outlet for processing emotion. I feel that to put scrutiny and focus onto yourself and your interrelationship with others, you open up a discourse about something universal, something simple and intuitive that everyone experiences.

Interview with Jennifer Davis

Jennifer Davis is a painter from Minneapolis, MN with a strong and unusual sense of the relationships between pattern and color. Her paintings of whimsical characters often carry a hint of an underlying darkness - disrupting the viewer's sense of innocence and simplicity.

ATX Beyond: How many pieces will you be showing in "A Certain Reality"?

Jennifer Davis: I think I will have around 10-12 paintings in the show.

ATX Beyond: Are there any primary themes you have kept in mind during your creations for this show?

JD: Not necessarily. I don't usually work in "series". However, because I am working on these paintings in the months leading up to the show, one after the other, they do carry certain threads throughout. Color-wise, these are definitely new for me. These paintings are darker and bolder than my previous pastel-color works. I have also been experimenting with gold leaf. Women and animals continue to appear in almost all of my paintings.

ATX Beyond: Your combinations of pattern and color are striking and often somewhat disorienting. They complicate the simplicity of your forms and add an uneasy dimension to works that are otherwise often innocent or whimsical. Where do you find inspiration for these combinations - both of color and pattern, and of these two elements and the form or character they accompany?

JD: Inspiration is pretty mysterious to me. It is so hard to pin down exactly where it comes from. I get obsessed with certain colors/subjects for a while and then they gradually disappear and are replaced by new ones. I have always been drawn to all things sweet and cutesy - and also to darker realism, horror films, etc. I think my paintings just reflect the dual nature of my personality - and of life in general. What goes in is what comes out. I love the play of cheery and pastel colors against darker more surreal themes.

ATX Beyond: It seems as though the distinction between human and animal, or animal and abstraction, is very liquid in all of your works - do you have anything to say on this matter?

JD: I have a tendency to anthropomorphize everything...animals, objects, anything. For the most part the animals in my paintings are stand-ins for people/self. Because we can never truly know what it is going on in their heads they make nice vessels for anything I might want to project onto them. Plus, animals are hilarious! They add a touch of humor and familiarity to even the darkest or most bizarre scenario.

ATX Beyond: You state that each of the images in your current works are strongly narrative - is there a story behind one of them in particular that you wouldn't mind sharing with us?

JD: I never set out to make paintings with any specific narrative in mind, so they aren't like fables or story-books. A lot of the paintings in the show have a strong narrative quality, but even, I don't know, for example, what those bipedal dogs are running from, what might lead to a future world with cat-shaped buses, or why a flower head is holding a nighttime seance. Ha! They are more like pages torn from a book where I am inviting the viewer to choose their own adventure.



"Bone Bonnet" by Megan Kimber

Interview with David Ball

David Ball is a multimedia/collage artist who resides in San Francisco, and greatly enjoys both coffee and his cat, Cho Cho. His works are formed of intricately assimilated collage pieces that disrupt and abstracts those recognizable individual pieces into strange characters and landscapes.

ATX Beyond: How many pieces will you be showing in "A Certain Reality"?

David Ball: Eight

ATX Beyond: Are there any primary themes you have kept in mind during your creations for this show?

DB: I focused on the pain of loss and moving on from it. The pieces emerge out of whatever happens to be weighing on my mind.

ATX Beyond: Describe for me your work process - you have stated that you work on all of your pieces for one show "in tandem". How did this method originate for you, and what do you feel it adds to the process of your work and the cohesiveness of a series?

DB: I generally start abstractly in acrylic and without intention. I am just looking for a good brush strike that suggests something to me. Then begins the tedium looking for collage components that help to begin to suggest something curious.

The reason that I began working this way is because collage

(in my process) is very much like finding a needle in a haystack. I sort through bins and bins of pre-cut material to find a suitable piece. To do this over and over again is much too time consuming so I decided that, by going through the collage sorting phase with multiple in mind, I could make better use of my efforts. After that point, I work on them one at a time in acrylic and colored pencil, cycling onto a different work when I grow tired of the piece that I am currently working.

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"Nighttime" by Jennifer Davis