

LaDuke's Paintings Explore the Limits of Digital and Actual Experiences



By Katherine Blackburne | 14 December 2018

Artistic virtuosity meets virtual space at Miles McEnergy Gallery

Tom LaDuke's paintings function better than most paintings do in tiny jpg format because they are built using a map of pixels and photographic content. LaDuke states that he "uses 3D computer graphic software to draft the design of the work. As a result, each work has a digital counterpart." All the zooming in is performed by the artist's brush.

LaDuke incorporates optical phenomena such as reflections and shadows, digital palimpsests, as well as layering of photographic material in order to suggest the ways in which our minds create an amalgamation

of vision and memory. Regardless of this focus on the human mind's experience, these paintings are mostly devoid of humanlike figuration, with a few exceptions such as small distorted reflection which reveals two barely discernible faces in one painting, or the outline of a human fetus in another. However, these figures do not appear to us as depictions of human life but instead suggest the smallness and incidental nature of humans in a vast universe. While the space within the painting appears completely homogenized, the objects within this space seem to defy all laws of physics. Multiple focal depths contrast close macro views against long deeper spaces.



Tom LaDuke, "Melt Into Stone" 2018, acrylic on canvas over panel, 82 1/2" x 104"

This is also the terrain of a unique painter-space, where virtuosic illusionist paintings are radically juxtaposed with deliberately heavy-handed mark-making. In this terrain the eye travels over the illusion of a vast empty space sparsely populated with meta objects, which are hyper-photo realistically rendered with zero-texture paint, only to arrive at a slab of heavy oil paint that is not pretending to be anything other than a half-inch thick wedge of paint. This method keeps us aware of the absolute two-dimensionality of the surface and curtails the suspension of disbelief. LaDuke's paintings suggest a layered human experience, comprised of mental space, virtual space, photography, an experience that includes the mundane space of office boardrooms, as well as the ubiquitous gallery space.

Tom LaDuke's attempt to encompass, hybridize and reconcile the digital experience and 'actual' experience – at their very intersection – begs the question of whether the two can even be separated? Beyond the selection tool in Photoshop and drop-shadow distortion aesthetic of 3D modeling programs, beyond the spectacle of LaDuke's obvious skill in paint handling, we are presented with serene hybrid spaces of interior and exterior in which the viewer may imagine themselves as the sole inhabitant and an architect of a world within a world.