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MATT HANSEL >

BOB BICKNELL-KNIGHT



Sunken Relic. Image credit: Dom Nieri

I was ecstatic actually to find out that these were not paintings except for the sides of them. Maybe because it was a nice surprise, it created an illusion about the painting that was not just it wrapping around the object that is the stretcher, but was melting into that negative space -- not bleeding through the canvas though. I wondered a lot about the nature of the surface of a painting and a print and it presents in person almost exactly as it does online except the edges, and I definitely thought it was all paint before. Perhaps I didn't pay attention to the materials lists in the packets Anthony sent me... there are a lot of pieces, and perhaps, what do you call these paintings? You can totally answer that question below if you so please, these are some introductory thoughts I thought would be good for me to share in case you would like to respond to any of it or just get an idea of where I am beginning.

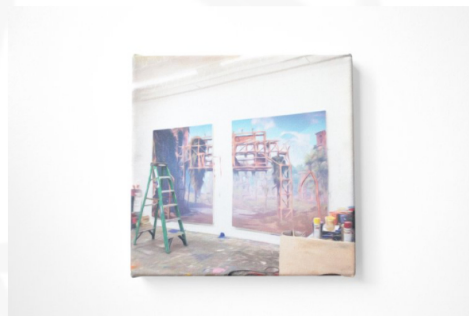
Julia Monte: Can you share a little about your process and the treatment of material? Does the paint only really exist on the edges of your works or is it utilized during the process of producing the face of the image? *I am thinking about the tiny painting a lot here where we are given a view of gigantic pieces in a studio that make me feel like they were painted and then printed...can't say for sure.*

Bob Bicknell-Knight: I usually refer to my canvas-based works as paintings, although sometimes it's easier to refer to them as hybrid paintings so that people understand that they're not made purely of paint on a canvas. I call them paintings as many new media artists before me, like Petra Cortright, refer to their 2D artworks as paintings, even though physical paint isn't used in the process. I think painting as a defining term has become a lot more nuanced, and generally encompasses anything that's 2D these days.

The paintings begin as manipulated digital images. For In Crystallized Time I'm exhibiting three paintings from three different series, with different levels of manipulation. The first is a work from 2019, Sunken Relic, where the image was originally captured whilst playing the video game Horizon Zero Dawn. Another, from 2020, Labour Pool, was originally a promotional image from Amazon, showing the inside of one of their Fulfillment Centres. The final piece, Studio View (28 October, 2019), began as an artist studio image, taken from the internet. These original digital images, once edited in various ways, are then printed onto canvas, stretched and then painted onto with acrylic paint, with the offline artist's hand interacting with the original online digital image. The sides are colour matched, and sometimes I'll partially paint onto the front too.



Installation view. Image credit: Dom Nieri



Studio View (28 October, 2019)

I've been making 2D work in this way for a few years now, and during this time I've regularly posted "studio view" images to my Instagram account. These are images of artist studios that I've found, mostly on social media, and have inserted my own digital images into. This process has created a persona and identity of a prolific painter, one that inhabits multiple studios on a bi-monthly basis. It's interesting that you say you didn't realise at first that the works weren't all paint, and that maybe that was because you weren't paying attention to the material list, as the "studio view" body of work is partly about the lack of research that people do into what they see online and on social media in particular. If you spend a little bit of time researching my work or reading a past interview it's quite apparent that they aren't "all paint" paintings, but a lot of the people who see my work, particularly online, won't take the time to do that.

That last sentence definitely struck me with a bit of guilt, but I knew there was a great point inside of it, and it wasn't as pointed as I may have previously thought. We had a whole email conversation that went something like this:

"...I will admit that I didn't fully research every artists' works though I did try to do as much as I could, and I did spend a lot of time looking at your website isthisit?, so I got a bit wrapped up in that! Anthony lent me your book Networked Futures...and that has been really helpful in finishing off some of my thoughts I have about ICT in context. I am definitely acknowledging my eagerness too to see the material of paint being manipulated to look so digitally smooth, when it is really smart the way you are utilizing actual digital gestures and I am glad to see work that is really aware of the expanding definition of painting. It is a bit of my past learning of toxic ideologies around traditional painting that I am sometimes forcing things to be material that aren't, in my brain. I also remember looking at your work on your website in 2019 when Anthony first shared your work with me...and I flipped over the Graveyard series. So, perhaps that is where my predisposition to label these works as paintings as well, when I wasn't really looking at a list that had all the materials on it for the pieces. Made for a fun time when I got in front of a lot of the work! And then some of the paintings really changed when I could see the edges of the mark, as it goes..."

...and THEN I sent a separate email shortly after, like the over-sharer I am, because I realized I was thinking about the first paintings of Bicknell-Knight's that curator Anthony White floored me with back in 2019 (*Graveyards*, pictured behind this text which can be found [here](#)) and had to share:

"...ah just having one more thought, I think when I read "Ink and acrylic" on a detailed materials description, I don't think about ink as a print right away. So, I'll definitely seek to be more investigative and curb my assumptions before running away with them...cheers! — J"

Bob was so kind to respond to my frantic embarrassment and quasi-defensiveness with:

BBK: Ah I hope I wasn't too harsh about you not researching my work to find out if they were paintings or not aha! I Liked how the questions were open ended and probing, and you not knowing 100% whether they were full paint paintings or not felt like a perfect excuse to talk about the Studio View series and what they're about. I of course understand that you've probably interviewed a number of artists for this, and obviously there's always a limit of how much research you allocate to an artist and their work, especially when the deadlines are this tight! I'm so glad the Networked Futures book has been helpful too. It's so rare to get feedback about the books and what I do with isthisit?, so it's good to hear that they are useful, and that you can get wrapped up in the website too!

Whew... definitely check out [isthisit?](#)



JM: The works in this show give us a few different views and senses of scale. The succinctness of the process is apparent as well as the hallucinogenic trip-like imagery I am getting in each image (the swirling o.o) as it carries through each. Is this an effect driven by a "machine" (if you will, for lack of a better term) or is it mostly your hand warping an image? I'm interested in the relationship of trust you have with your own hand and that which you have with technology.

BBK: So the effect is mostly machine driven, involving me manipulating these images, either found online or created from scratch, using Photoshop. I've learned a lot about the software I use since I started making these paintings, and feel that I've somewhat refined how I create the works. I see it as a collaboration between my online and offline self, but am far more trusting of the digital side of the process. I've never been trained as a painter, so the physical colour matching part of the process has definitely changed and improved since I started working in this way.





JM: Your work feels like a capsule of kinetic energy, but also so barren or hopeless, an abandoned car, a dull office of organized chaos, a tiny image of gigantic dystopian feeling views...are these off base? If I am not off, I am curious if you think more about aftermaths as opposed to revival... or what you think about my reading of these works! Of course, art is subjective.

BBK: I think those themes that you mention are definitely apparent in a lot of my work, especially that of hopelessness, of being trapped or curtailed within a system that feels somewhat inescapable. *Sunken Relic*, and the series of works that the piece is from, is definitely about the aftermath, hinting at an event in the past that's already happened, or at least a process that is ongoing, that of bit rot, the slow deterioration of data over time. In contrast, *Labour Pool* explores the ongoing neglect that Amazon employees endure on a daily basis. The still image has definitely captured a moment of frantic energy, of workers packing products into cardboard boxes, intent on making their quota for the day. *Studio View* (28 October, 2019) is kind of like faux chaos or, as you say, organised chaos; an image of an artist studio that's been highly edited and cropped, featuring digital paint splatters and potentially actualised paintings.

Thank you again to Bob for taking the time to virtually chat with me about his work. Don't forget to check out all of his online endeavors and come back for more interviews weekly.

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